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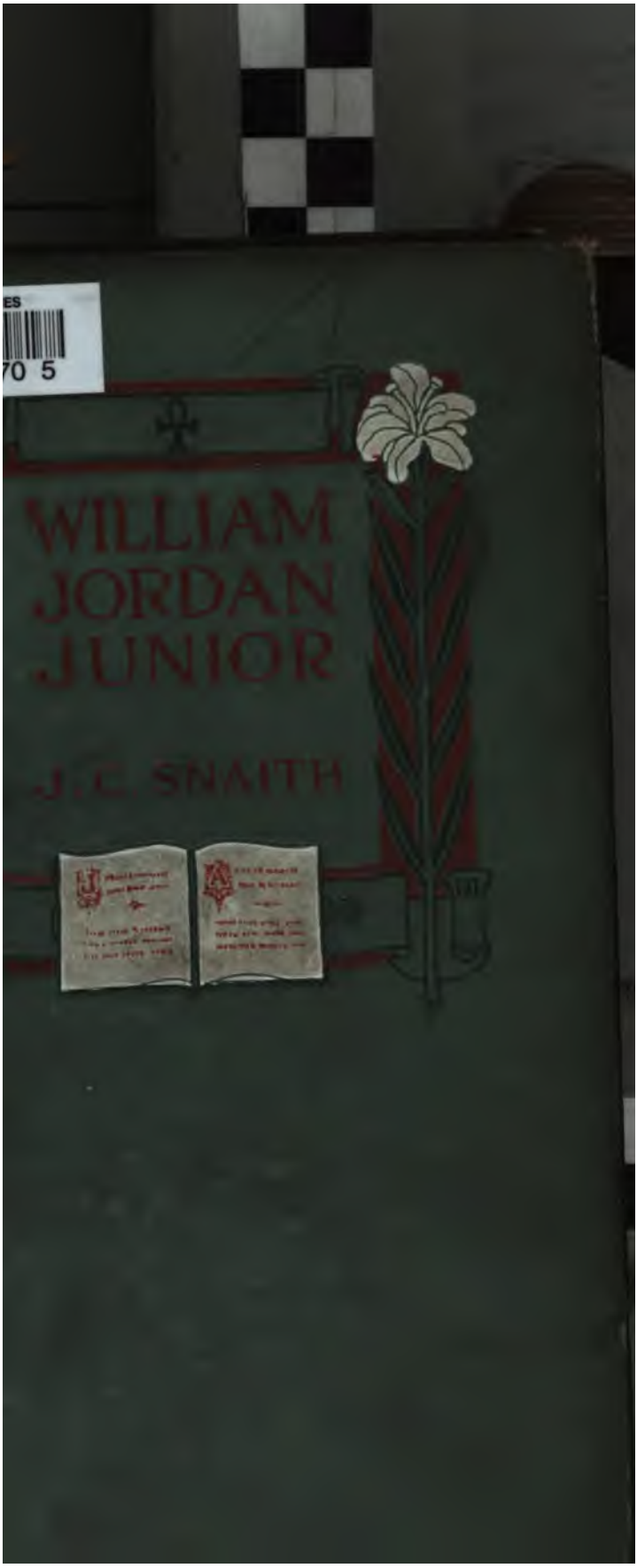
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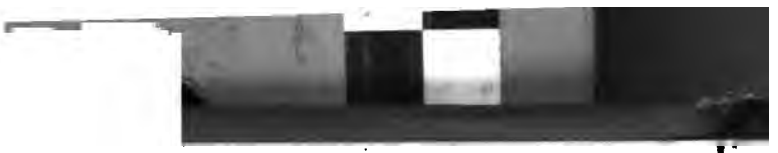

WILLIAM JORDAN, JUNIOR

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BY

J. C. SNAITH
AUTHOR OF "BROKE OF COVENDEN," ETC.

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I

It had been raining all day in London. The beating of water, cold, monotonous and heavy upon the streets, had now acquired mystery from the darkness of a November night. The vague forms floating here and there through the haze of the lamps, which a few hours ago were easy to define, were full of strangeness, while the noise of the water as it gurgled into the sewers, and slopped from the spouts over the dark fronts of the shops had a remote significance. Now and again odd shapes would emerge from the curtain of the shadows: a wet policeman, a dog, a bedraggled walker of the streets, a sullen cabman, a lame horse. Over and above, round and about these phantasmal appearances, was the sound of continual water falling upon the great roar of London.

In one of the narrow purlieus leading from the City to the eastern wilderness, night had erased the actual like a wet cloth drawn across writing in chalk upon a board. Two rows of sopping shuttered walls were only able to emit an occasional smear of lamplight, by which the pageant of the individual con-

sciousness could embody itself. Here and there a signboard would be half-disclosed over some deserted shop; and in the middle of a long and very dismal thoroughfare was one that seemed to take a quality from the fact that a faint gleam of light was stealing through a chink in the shutters of a door. Above this door, in faded letters which the film of shadows rendered barely visible, was the legend, "Second-hand Bookseller." It seemed to be centuries old. The light, however, frail as it was, somehow appeared to make it memorable. Yet the source of this talisman was not the shop itself, but a little room that lay behind.

This small shop in which a thousand and one volumes huddled, like corpses in a chasm, seemed almost to form an intermediary between the real on the one hand, and the chimerical on the other. On its shelves, in a limbo of darkness and neglect, lay the dead, the dying, and the imperishable. Buried in dust and decay, in covers that could hardly hold together, were pregnant annotations upon the human comedy. On the upper shelves were tomes whose destiny it had been to hold back the hands of time, and they had fulfilled it. Below these were a thousand formulas which had proved disconcerting to man. Still, however, as in the sodden and shadow-fraught chimera beyond the shutters, even here darkness did not reign inviolate. There were tiny lamps on this shelf and that: like those in the street without the power to offer more than a flicker of light,

yet able to suggest that the blackest night is susceptible of challenge. A candle shone here and there in the gloom, faint yet invincible, like a will-o'-the-wisp that hops about the mounds in a cemetery.

Opening out of the shop was a little inner room. It was from this that the thread of light proceeded. This tiny chamber, some twelve feet by sixteen, had little furniture. In the centre was a quaint old table. A curious tome of yellow parchments was spread open upon it. Built into the outer wall was a cupboard. Its heavy oak door was studded with nails and strongly secured. In the grate the fire was bright; the bare floor and walls were spotless; and from the low ceiling depended a lamp in the form of a censer whose light was soft yet clear.

The room had two occupants: a man whose hair was almost white and a boy. Each was immersed in a book: the man in the tome outspread on the table, whose yellow leaves, venerable binding, and iron clasps, gave it a monastic appearance; the boy was reading in the ancient authors.

The countenance of each was remarkable. The eyes of the man were those which age does not darken; yet his cheeks were gaunt, and the lines of his frame revealed a premature decrepitude; but the ample forehead and every feature was suffused with the luminosity by which a high intelligence reflects itself. The face of the boy, pale, gentle and mobile, was too rare to describe. His eyes, vivid in hue and very deeply set, were bright with a kind of veiled

lustre; his form was of elfin slightness; his hands looked as frail as gossamer. Yet the countenance, although full of the solemn wonder of childhood, and angelic beauty, was marred by a gross physical blemish. Every feature appeared to have been touched by the wand of a fairy, yet in the middle of the right cheek was an open wound.

There was not a sound in the little room except the ticking of the clock, and an occasional creak from the fire. Now and again the man would pause in his scrutiny of the old yellow page. Uplifting the finger which pursued every word of the faded and almost illegible writing, he would seem to consider it with secret thoughts shaping themselves upon his lips. Then he would smile a little and sigh faintly and turn to it again.

Presently his gaze sought the boy. Within it was a look of indescribable solicitude, for as the boy crouched over the old volume printed in black letter which he held upon his knees, great tears dripped softly from his eyes. The white-haired man addressed him in a low voice that was like a caress.

"Ah, my brave one! thou dost not fear the drama."

The boy looked up with a startled face. He gave a little shiver; he was wan with pain.

"What is that, my father," he asked, "that you speak of as the drama?"

"What is that, beloved one," asked his father, "that afflicts you with dismay?"

The boy pressed his palms against his thin temples with a gesture of weariness.

"I think — I think it is the words, my father," he said, "the something in the sound of the words."

"Truly," said his father, "the something in the sound of the words. That which is given is taken away — the something in the sound of the words."

"Did you not say, my father," said the boy, "that the drama was — was what you call a 'play'?"

"Yes, a play," said his father, "a bewildering and curious play — a haunting and strange play. It is almost terrible, and yet it is mysteriously beautiful."

"I don't understand," said the boy, his eyes growing dark with perplexity.

His father was quick to read his distress, and a mournful compassion came into his face. The boy left his book and came to his father's side. The man folded the frail and excitable form to his bosom.

"Patience, patience, agile spirit!" he exclaimed as he pressed his lips upon the gaunt cheek upon which lay the wound.

"I must understand all things, my father," said the boy, who was composed a little by his father's arms. "I — I must know something more about the drama, for I — I must understand it all."

"It is that which we feel," said his father. "It is sometimes in the air. If we listen we can hear it. I can hear it now."

The boy lifted his face with all his senses strung:

"I can only hear the ticking of the clock, my father, and the creaking of the fire."

"There is something else."

The boy walked to the shutters of the little room, pressed his ears against them, and listened with great intensity.

"There is only the gurgle of water," he said, "and the little voice of the wind."

"And," said the man with faint eyes.

"And — and! And the mighty roar of the streets of the great city."

"That is the drama, beloved one."

The boy sprang away from the shutters with a little cry.

"Yes, now I know," he said excitedly. "Now I know what it is. And it *was* the something in the sound of the words. That which is given is taken away. It is what I am always dreaming about this little room of ours. I am always dreaming my father, that it has been taken from us, that we have been cast out of it, that we have it no more. I have even dreamt that we wandered all day and all night in the cold and dreadful streets of the great city, among all those fierce and cruel street-persons, and that they looked upon us continually with their rude eyes. Then it is that I shiver so much in my fear that I awaken; and I could shout with joy when I find it is ours still, and that it has all been a dream."

The look of compassion deepened in the man's face.

"Dost thou never grow weary of this little room?" he said.

"Never, never, my father," said the boy. "I can never grow weary of this little room. I almost wish sometimes we did not venture to leave it, lest one day we should lose our path in the great city, and not find our way back. I sometimes think I would like to stay in it every moment of my earth-life, so that I might read every one of those authors in the shop. How I wish, my father, that I understood all the hard words and all the strange tongues like you do. But at least I understand one more very difficult word now that I know what is the meaning of the drama."

"That is to say, beloved one," said his father, "now that you understand the meaning of the drama you hold the key to many other words that are also very difficult."

"Yes, yes, my father — and how quickly I shall learn them!"

"You are indeed wonderful at learning."

"Yet sometimes, my father, I hardly dare to think how much there is to know. Sometimes when I lie by your side in the darkness, my father, and something seems to have happened to the moon, I almost feel that I shall never be able to know all."

"Thou art quite resolved, my brave one, to know all?"

"Oh yes, my father," said the boy, and his eyes grew round with surprise at the question.

"Wherefore, beloved?"

"I must, I must!" said the boy, and his eyes grew dark with bewilderment. "Dost thou not know, O my father ——" He checked his words of surprised explanation shyly and suddenly.

"I know," said his father gently, "thou art one of great projects."

"I had forgotten, O my father," said the boy, a little timorously, "that I had not revealed them unto you."

"Pray reveal them unto me," said the man softly.

The boy faltered. A shy blush overspread the pallor of his cheeks.

"I am to be one of the great ones of the earth, my father," he said, with the sensitive gaze of a girl.

"Truly," said his father, with a glance of grave tenderness; "destiny declared it so in the hour that you were born. And I doubt not you will be called to great endeavors."

"Oh yes, my father," said the boy, with strange simplicity. "I am to walk the path of heroes."

The white-haired man averted his glance.

"It is for that reason I must be well found in knowledge, my father," said the boy.

"True, beloved one," said the man through pale lips.

"And the meaning of every thing, my father,"

said the boy; "bird, beast and reptile, and the moon and stars, and why the street-persons walk the streets of the great city; and why the earth is so many-colored; and why the sky is so near and yet so far off; and why when you clutch the air there is nothing in your hand. Must not such as I know all this, my father?"

"True."

"And why a man has two legs, and a horse four, and a crocodile I know not how many, and why a seprent crawls upon its belly."

"True, true," said his father. "But I fear, beloved one, that all this knowledge is not to be acquired in this little room of ours. If you wish to learn the meaning of all things, will you not have to go to school?"

A shiver passed through the boy's frame. His face had the pallor of great fear.

"Dost thou mean, O my father," he said, "that I must leave this little room of ours and go out among the street-persons in the endless streets of the great city?"

"He who would understand the meaning of all things," said his father, "must certainly go to school."

"Yet are not all things to be learned from the ancient authors, my father?" asked the boy eagerly. "Is not every secret contained in those hundreds of books in the shop that it is not yet given to my mind to grasp?"

"There are many secrets, beloved, which no book has the power to reveal."

"Not even those among them, my father, which are wrought of the great souls of heroes?" said the boy in dismay.

"Not even they."

"Yet have I not heard you say, my father, that there were few things they did not understand?"

"True, beloved, but they had not the power to commit the whole of their knowledge to their writings."

"But did you not say, my father, that each of these great ones communed with his peers constantly and faithfully in his little inner room?"

"What a prodigious memory is yours! But I ought to have made it clear to you that before these heroes could commune with their peers faithfully, they were compelled to leave their little rooms, adventure out among the streets of the great city and go to school."

"Then, my father, I also will go to school."

The boy clasped his frail hands, and strove to conceal the abject fear in his eyes.

"When, my brave one?"

"To-morrow I will go, my father."

"So be it then, beloved one."

In the silence which followed the tense breathing of the frail form could be heard to surmount the ticking of the clock, the creaking of the fire, the little voice of the wind, the gurgle of water, and the great roar of London.

"Are all heroes in bitter fear, my father, when first they go to school?" asked the boy.

"Indeed, yes."

"Do they ever tremble like cravens, and do their eyes grow dark?"

"Yes, beloved one."

"Have not these great ones a strange cowardice, my father?"

"Is not the cowardice of heroes the measure of their courage?"

"Can it be, O my father," said the boy, with a deepening pallor, "that these great ones derive their valor from their craven hearts?"

"Truly, beloved, if they learn the secret."

"The secret, my father?"

"The secret which is only to be learned in the school which is in the streets of the great city."

The face of the boy grew like death. "To-morrow, then, my father," he said in a faint and small voice, "Achilles will adventure forth to this school which is in the streets of the great city, that he too may learn this secret. He should have known that one like himself should not only have great learning, wisdom and constancy, but also a noble valor."

"True, a thousand times! This is indeed Achilles!"

"I give you good-night, my father. Pray remember me in your vigil."

The boy threw his arms round the man's neck, and pressed his cheek against him. It seemed to burn like a flame.

The boy took a candle from the chimney-piece, lighted it, and in his great fear of the darkness, was accompanied by his father up the stairs. When the white-haired man enveloped the frail form in the blankets with a woman's tenderness, he left the light in the chamber burning at its fullest, and returned to the little room. It was then near to midnight.

The massive old tome in which he had been reading was open still upon the table. He knelt before it, pressing his eyes upon the yellow parchments. On the clock in the little room the hands made their tardy circuit: midnight passed; one o'clock; two o'clock; three o'clock. Throughout these hours the man remained thus, not heeding that all about him was darkness; for the lamp and the fire had burned themselves out long ago.

Near to the hour of four a ghostly figure, pale but luminous, crept into the silence of the room. It was the boy, clad in a white gown and bearing a lighted candle. He touched the kneeling figure softly.

"My father," he breathed; "how you tremble, my father, and how cold you are!"

The man rose to his feet with a slight shiver.

"The fire is low," he said. "Are we not ever cold when the fire is low?"

"The fire is out, my father," said the boy.

"Is the fire ever out, beloved," said his father, "while one ember is still faintly burning? May we not draw it into flame perhaps?"

The man knelt again and breathed upon the embers, so that presently they began to glow.

"I could not rest, my father," said the boy, "and I grew so afraid of the loneliness that I have come to be near you. I do not think it is raining now, but the wind is speaking bitterly. I wish the stars would shine. I am not so craven-hearted when the stars look at me with their bright eyes."

"May there not be one among all those millions," said his father, "who knows that to be so, and shines out to comfort you? Let us look."

With eager hands the boy helped his father to unfasten and cast back the shutters. Through heavy masses of walls and chimney-stacks a fragment of the void was to be seen. Across it the broken clouds were scudding, and a single star was visible. It emerged faint but keen and clear.

"It is Jupiter," cried the boy in a voice of joy and excitement. "Hail, mighty prince of the heavens! Ave, ave, great lord of the air!"

The patient white-haired figure at the boy's side was peering also towards the star. In his eyes shone the entrancement of many thoughts.

II

When at last the morning brought its gray light the boy set out with his father into the streets of the great city. Amid the dun-colored wilderness through which he passed, amid the labyrinth of dread thoroughfares in which noise, dirt, and confusion seemed to contend, he grasped his father's hand in the fear of his heart. The rattle of horses and carts, the mud-flinging hoofs and the cries of the drivers, the vigor and rudeness of the street-persons by whom he was hustled, filled him with a dire consternation. Yet beyond all that he suffered in this way, which was no more than a little personal inconvenience after all, was the fear, permanent, overmastering and intense, that never would his father and he be able to retrace their steps to that tiny refuge which they had left so lately, which now seemed so far away that they could never hope to win their way back. How could they hope to retrace their steps among that ever-surging sea of streets and houses and faces and vehicles? Once as he was submerged in a whirlpool that was formed by the meeting of four main arteries of traffic, and was compelled to wait until a strangely clad street-person, who wore a helmet like Minerva, stopped, by the magic process of holding up

his hand, the unending procession of carts and horses to enable his father and himself and a swarm of street-persons, who pressed upon his heels and trod upon his toes, to pass to that debatable land across the way, which looked so full already that it could not yield space for another living soul, he held his father's hand convulsively and said in a voice of despair: "I feel sure, my father, we shall never win our way back to our little room."

In point of actual time this journey was not more than half-an-hour, yet it formed such a highly wrought experience, that to the boy it seemed to transcend and even to efface all that had previously happened in the placid term of his existence. At last it came to an end in a succession of quiet streets that led to a gloomy square, which, although very forbidding of aspect, was almost peaceful. The houses in it, tall and stately and austere, had a row of steep stone steps furnished with iron railings. It was one of these rows he ascended; and his father knocked with a boldness that seemed superhuman at a very stern-looking front door.

After a brief period of waiting in which it seemed to the boy that he must be choked by the violent beatings of his heart, the door was opened by an old woman, equally stern of aspect, who asked their business in a gruff voice. The boy's father said something to her which the boy was too excited to comprehend, whereupon she conducted them into a dark passage filled with bad air, and left them there

while she went to inquire if they would be received by him they sought. Presently she returned to lead them to his presence.

In a room at the end of the long passage, which seemed to grow darker and darker at every step they took, they found a very aged man. In appearance he was not unlike a faun. His eyes were sunken far in his cheeks, and they seemed to be faded like those of the blind. His features were so lean that they looked almost spectral; his tall frame and long limbs were warped with feebleness; and the boy noticed that his hands had red mittens to keep them warm. His head, which was of great nobility, was bald at the top, yet the lower part was covered by hair that was even whiter than that of the boy's father, and so long that it came down upon his shoulders.

This venerable figure sat at a table before a fire in a dark and sombre room, which faced the north and smelt of ink. Maps were on the walls; here and there were scattered books; there was a globe on a tripod; while blackboards, charts and desks abounded in all the panoply of education. The old schoolmaster was ruling lines in a ciphering-book with the gravest nicety; while at his back the fire was shedding its glow on a coat which use had rendered green, ragged and threadbare.

When the boy and his father came into his presence, the aged man, although stricken with painful infirmity, rose to his feet and welcomed them with a beautiful courtesy.

"I cannot expect you to remember me, sir," said the boy's father, with a simplicity that was a little timorous.

The aged school-master approached quite close to the boy's father; in his faded eyes was a peering intentness.

"You must give me a minute to think, if you please," he quavered in a low voice, which in the ears of the boy had the effect of music. "Now that I am old, my memory, of which I have always been vain, is the first to desert me. If you are one of my scholars I shall recall you, for it is my boast that each of my scholars has graven a line in the tablets of my mind."

Of a sudden the aged school-master gave a cry of joy.

"Why — why!" he exclaimed, "it must be William Jordan."

He held out both his hands to the boy's father with an eagerness that was like a child's, and the boy saw that his eyes, which a moment since were destitute of meaning, had now the pregnant beauty of an ancient masterpiece.

"O that the hour should be at hand," said the old man, "when I should cease to recall William Jordan!"

The old man seemed to avert his face from that of the boy's father in a kind of dismay; and his voice pierced the boy with an emotion that he had never felt before.

"It is thirty years since you saw me last," said the boy's father.

"In the flesh as an eager-faced young man," said the school-master. "But every night as I sit by the fire, I summon William Jordan to lead the pageant of my experience. When my spirit is like clay you stand before it, the first among the valiant, so subtle yet so brave. When this generation, which is so restless, so brilliant, so full of vitality, seems to tell me that I am but a survival of a phase which now is nought, I say to it, 'So be it, my children, but where is the William Jordan among you? I would have you show me his peer before I yield.'"

The boy, whose nature was like the strings of some miraculous instrument which are not only susceptible to the slightest human touch, but are also responsive to the delicate waves in the air, knew that some strange emotion was overwhelming his father, although none could have perceived it but himself.

"My dear old master," said the boy's father, with an indescribable melancholy, "it is the old voice — the old voice that we loved to hear. And it is the old courage — the old incomparable suit of mail."

"A school-master's courage should increase as he grows old, I think," said the old man, whose voice was like a harp. "It is true his age is menaced by all the noble energies he has failed to mold; by all the expenditure of spirit, by all the devout patience he has lavished upon them, which have come to no

harvest; but is it not by giving our all without hope of a requital that in the end teaches us to accept our destiny?"

The boy's father stood like a statue before his old preceptor.

"Master, your voice overcomes me," he said. "But it is just, it is perfectly just that I should live to hear it sound reproachful in my ears."

"I do not reproach you, dear Isocrates," said the old man, with the exquisite humility that is only begotten by wisdom. "Or if my words have chidden you it is that there is an echo in yourself. Isocrates was ever your name among us. We cannot order our destiny; we can only fulfil it."

"I was one of great projects," said the boy's father.

"Him whom I recall had ambition burning in his veins like a chemical," said the old man.

"Yes, master," said the boy's father, with a curious simplicity, "but on the day he tasted the poppy, perished the red blood in his veins. From that hour he could never be what he promised. The strength was taken from his right hand."

An expression of pain escaped the lips of the aged school-master.

"I foresaw that peril," he said. "I prayed for you continually, Isocrates; and I would have forewarned you had I not feared the catastrophe so much. It is the cardinal weakness of such as myself that we fear even to gaze upon the vulnerable

heel whereby the poisoned arrow enters the powerful. False preceptor hast thou been, O Socrates, to the young Plato!"

The aged man seemed all broken by the sudden anguish that shook his feebleness. The boy's father, in whose eyes the suffering of his former preceptor was reflected, raised the senile fingers to his lips with strange humility.

"All the devices of the pharmacopeia," said the boy's father, "could not have kept the poison out of these weak veins, dear master. It is one more act of wantonness that we must lay to the door of Nature. For the poison was first compounded by the fermentation of those many diverse and potent essences with which the blood was charged. It is the curse of the age, master. It is the deadly gas exuded by the putrefaction of what we have agreed to call 'progress,' which fuses the nerves and the tissues into the incandescent fervor by which they destroy themselves."

"But only, Apollo, that there may be a nobler renascence."

"We shall not heed it, master, when we lie with the worms."

"Ah, no! Yet as we crouch by the fire on these cold winter evenings, is it not well to wrap ourselves in the vision of all the undeveloped glories in our midst? Is it not well for our minds to behold a William Jordan brooding in his garret among all

these millions of people who will never learn his name? For thirty years have I been seeking that treatise by which he is to establish Reason on its only possible basis."

"Ah, dear master, philosophy is an anodyne for subtle minds," said the boy's father.

"Were these your words, Isocrates, when you expounded to me that wonderful synopsis on your twentieth birthday?"

"Philosophy is a narcotic which in the end destroys the cells of the brain."

"And poetry, my dear friend, what is poetry?"

"I have not the courage to define it, master."

"Is this the language of despair, Isocrates?"

"It is the curse of the time, dear master," said the boy's father, with wan eyes. "This terrible electrical machinery of the age which grandiloquently we call Science, has ground our wits to a point so fine that they pierce through the brave old faiths that once made us happy. This William Jordan of whom you speak spent twenty years in his little room seeking to establish Reason on its only possible basis. He planned his ethic in I know not how many tomes. Each was to be a masterpiece of courage, truth, and vitality; each was to be wrought of the life-blood and fine flower of his manhood. He began his labor a powerful and imperious young man; he passed the all-too-rapid years in his profound speculations; and then he found himself inept and white-haired."

"So then, after all, Isocrates, your ethic is embodied?" said the aged man with the eager devoutness of the disciple.

The joy in the face of the old man was that of one who has long dreamed of a treasure which at last is to be revealed to his gaze. His eyes were about to feast on its peerless splendor, yet of a sudden his hopes seemed to render him afraid. There might not be a sufficient heat left in his veins to yield those intolerable pangs of rapture which fuse with ecstasy the worship of the devotee.

"Let me see it," he said. "The desires of my youth are returning upon me. I must look upon it; I must press it to my bosom. I yearn to see how my own strength in the heyday of its promise, in the passion of its development, yet condemned to walk in chains, has yet been able to vindicate the nobility of its inheritance. Show me your Ethic, beloved Isocrates. I yearn to feast my eyes upon this latest blow for freedom with the same intensity with which I fingered the yellow pages in which I first found wisdom hiding her maiden chastity."

The boy's father met this entreaty with a gesture that seemed to pierce the old man like a sword.

"Where is it?" he cried. "You will not deny one who is old the last of his hopes!"

The boy's father had the mien of a corpse.

"It is unwritten, master," he said, in a voice that seemed to be no louder than the croak of a frog. "When after twenty years of devout preparation I

took up the pen, I found that Nature had denied the strength to my right hand."

The old man recoiled from the gaze of the boy's father with a cry of dismay.

"I should have known it," he said; and then, with strange humility, "let us not reproach her, Isocrates; she, too, must obey the decree."

"By which human sacrifice is offered on her altars," said the boy's father, with a gaunt gaze. "What new abortion shall she fashion with our blood and tears?'

"The issue of our loins," said the aged man, with a kind of gentle passion.

"In order that our humiliation may re-enact itself," said the boy's father; "in order, dear master, that we may mock ourselves again."

"Nay, Isocrates," said the old man, "is it not written that if by our fortitude we sustain the Dynasty to its appointed hour, Nature will grant it a means to affirm itself?"

Speaking out of a simple faith the old man turned for the first time to the boy, who, throughout this interview, had stood timidly at his father's side. The old faded eyes seemed to devour the delicate and shrinking face of the child with their surmise. Suddenly he took the boy by the hand.

"It is by this that the Dynasty will affirm itself," said the old man, enfolding the frail form in a kind of prophetic exaltation.

The boy's father seemed to cower at these words of his old preceptor.

"My prophetic soul!" he cried. Horror appeared to scarify the wasted features of the boy's father.

The proud gladness of the well-remembered voice had seemed to break the boy's father; for those ears it was charged with mockery.

The old school-master, still smiling in the expression of his simple faith, received his former pupil in his arms and took him to his bosom with the ineffable tenderness by which a matron consoles a young girl.

The boy could not understand this painful scene which had been enacted before him. He could form no conception of the manner in which two natures had been wrung by their first meeting after thirty years. He could only discern, and that very dimly, that this aged man bore a similar relation to his father to that his father bore to himself. The voice, the look, the bearing of this old man, were precisely those with which he himself was succored when he awoke shuddering and bathed in terror, and implored his father to strike a match to dispel the phantasies which peopled the darkness of the night.

III

Sunk in bewilderment that one so wise and powerful as his father should be so distressed, the boy seemed to lose the sense of what was taking place around him. But he was recalled to it with a start of dismay; his father was about to leave the room. Involuntarily he turned to the door also, and placed his hand on his father's arm.

"Do you forget that you are now at school, Achilles?" said his father in a low voice.

The boy could not repress a little quiver of fear.

"You — you are not going to forsake me, my father!" he said.

"What of the resolve you took last night?" said his father. "By whose act is it, beloved one, that you have come to school?"

A vague sense of darkness seemed to close about the boy.

"But our little room," he said, shivering. "Am I never to return to it, my father? Am I never to behold it again?"

"I make you my promise, beloved one," said his father softly. "At dusk I will return to take you there."

Furtively, mournfully the boy relaxed his grip of his father's hand.

In the next instant he realized that his father was gone, and that he was alone with the dumb immensity of his despair. All about him was black and vague. Yet in the midst of the close-pressing stillness sat the school-master, a venerable and silent form, slowly ruling lines in a ciphering-book. How old, noble, and patient he looked!

Presently the aged master ceased from his labors. He gathered a pile of books, rose and placed them under his arm. He turned to the boy, who was weeping secretly, and said, "Dry your eyes and come with me."

Filled with nameless misgivings, the boy followed the school-master out through the door, along a passage, and down a flight of stone stairs. At the bottom of these was another door. It opened into a large room, which was full of youthful street-persons, and a great clamor.

The master took his seat at a table apart. It was somewhat higher than the desks at which the youthful street-persons were seated. He told the boy, who followed very close upon his heels, to sit at his side.

The entrance of the aged master appeared to have an effect upon the behavior of his scholars, or perhaps the appearance in his wake of a new companion had engaged their curiosity. But the boy, trembling in every limb, was far from returning their bold glances. He sat close by the master, mutely craving protection from the fierce horde that was all about him. Had he been led into a den of wild

beasts, his fear could not have been more extreme.

The tasks of the day were begun by each of the boys reading aloud in his turn a brief portion of Holy Writ. To him, who heard their voices for the first time, they sounded harsh, strange, and uncouth. Most of them faltered and grew confused at the easiest words, in none were sincerity and coherence; and when the master, to sustain one who was baffled, recited a few verses, his tones, in their sweetness and dignity, sounded like music. Sometimes the master would remark upon the beauty and truth of that which was read, or he would pause to furnish a parallel out of common experience, in order to elucidate an incident as it was narrated.

The presence of this gentle and learned man, the continual sense that he was near, began to soothe the boy's tremors. And the beautiful language seemed to gird him with the sense of a new and enkindling security. But his terror returned upon him with overmastering power when the moment came in which he was asked personally to continue the theme. The whole of it had long been so familiar to him that he carried every word in his heart, yet when the call was made upon him to recite that for which he required no book, he was so much oppressed with the nameless dread of his surroundings that he could only gasp and burst into tears.

After all the boys had done their tasks after their own private fashion, the master read to them a fable, which the boy recognized gratefully as an old friend

out of the ancient authors; also a wonderful tale from similar sources, and a few passages from the life of a great national hero.

The boy was enchanted. The simplicity of the reading made him strangely happy; the themes addressed him with a ravishment he had never felt before. And the horde of fierce creatures all about him, indulging in grimaces and covert horseplay, seemed also to become amenable to this delight. At least their uneasy roughness grew less as the beautiful voice proceeded; and by the time these stories of wonder, wisdom and endeavor were at an end, even the rudest among them had wide eyes and open mouths.

Upon the conclusion of these tales the old schoolmaster wrote a few cabalistic figures on a board, and then said to the boy, "Can you do sums?"

"I—I—I—I d-don't t-think I—I—I k-know, sir," said the boy, stammering timorously.

"Perhaps we will test your knowledge," said the old man, and added as he smiled in a secret and beautiful manner, "there is one simple question in arithmetic that it is the custom to put to a new scholar on his first appearance among us. Can you tell us what two and two make?"

Now, although the boy was advanced in book-knowledge far beyond his years, he had hardly the rudiments of the practical sciences. Therefore at first he was unable to answer the most primitive of all questions therein, and his confusion was great.

And the other boys who had heard this question, which was so simple as to seem ridiculous, observed his distress with a scorn that was far too lofty to conceal.

"What would you say that two and two make?" the school-master asked.

"I — I — I think, sir, they m-make five," stammered the boy at last.

A shout of laughter arose from the other boys at this grotesque answer.

"He thinks two and two make five!" boy after boy could be heard repeating to his companions; "he thinks two and two make five!"

The aged school-master, however, derived neither amusement nor scorn from this answer. His look was one of high yet grave happiness as he said, "We give a special name to each of our boys, and I have been wondering what name to bestow upon you. The name of your father was Isocrates — one of great gifts, but timorous of disposition; but I think you must be known by the name of a universal hero. We will call you by the name of Achilles, who was the bravest among all the Greeks."

At these words of the master looks of consternation clouded the faces of all the boys.

"Why, sir, he is a dunce," expostulated a thoughtful and shrewd boy with piercing black eyes.

The aged master looked at this boy with a mild indulgence in his smile.

"Adamantus," said the master, "that is a condi-

tion necessary to a universal hero in his youth."

Adamantus, who was one of the first boys in the school, was far from a comprehension of this dark saying; yet he felt himself to be rebuked, without knowing to what extent or why he should be. But shortly afterwards, when the play-hour came, and they ran out to indulge in their games in the small London garden, some of the older and graver boys, of whom Adamantus was one of the chief, stood apart to discuss what they were bound to consider an act of notorious partiality on the part of the master. That a mere small boy, a weak and foolish boy should be decorated with a much-coveted name for returning a ridiculous answer was one of those frank injustices that they felt obliged to resent.

"Adamantus only means that I am a bit of a sticker at my books, which I don't think I am really," said the bearer of that name; "and who ever heard of Polycrates and Polydames?"

"Yes, it is not fair;" said the bearer of the last of these names; "but then, he is an old fool. He is just an old dodderer."

When the boys had gone forth to the garden, the master said to his new pupil, "Will you not go out and make their acquaintance, Achilles?"

For answer the boy clasped his fingers about the master's sleeve. He had grown dumb with terror.

"So be it," said the old man, regarding him with pity and concealed tenderness.

A little while afterwards the boy rose suddenly of his own motion from the master's table.

"Where are you going, Achilles?" said the master.

"I — I am g-going, s-sir, to the garden to the boys," he stammered.

As he walked out through the door his gaunt cheeks were like death.

He crept into the garden with the greatest caution and secrecy. He hardly dared to breathe lest he should be heard, he feared to move lest he should be seen. Crouching against the wall, moving neither foot nor hand, he longed to stop the motions of his heart. They were so loud that he felt they were bound to be noticed.

His fears proved to be well founded. A tall, heavy, puffy boy with vivid red hair came near. He was trying to kick the cap of another boy, who was much smaller than himself, over the wall. By an odd misadventure one of these attempts landed it full in the face of the trembling intruder.

"Hullo, New Boy!" said the boy with red hair.

He gave the cap a final kick, which lifted it among the branches of the only tree the garden contained. He then turned his attention to his important discovery. He moistened his lips with his tongue, and gave an anticipatory leer to the figure that shrank away from him.

"New Boy," he said, "what is your name?"

"I — I d-don't t-think I know, sir," the boy stammered.

"D-don't t-think you know your name, New Boy," said the boy with red hair, with polite deprecation. "How odd!"

Almost as quick as thought the boy with red hair took the boy's arm in what seemed to be the grip of a giant and twisted it ferociously. The boy gave a little yelp of agony and stupefaction.

"D-doesn't t-that help you to remember your name, New Boy?" said the boy with red hair persuasively. As he spoke he pressed his face so close to that of the quivering thing in his grasp that he almost rubbed the gaunt cheek with his blunt and freckled nose.

The boy hung mute and limp with terror.

"L-lost y-your tongue, New Boy?" said the boy with red hair. "Or perhaps you haven't lost it really?"

The arm that was still in the grip of the giant received another such twist that a wild shriek was heard all over the garden.

The cry brought other boys crowding to the scene. They were of diverse ages and sizes, they were of various tempers and complexions, but one and all were animated by the same critical curiosity. Among them was a boy, who, although far more robust of physique, was slightly less in inches than he who cowered away from their eyes. He measured him carefully with his eye, and, seeming to derive an ampler

power from such gross terror, turned to his companions with a swelling air, as if to enforce the fact that in stature he was somewhat the less of the two, and said, "I think I ought to be able to hit him."

With chin borne loftily, with each step taken firmly yet delicately, and with an air of dauntlessness which affected not to be in the least conscious of the approval such a deed was bound to excite in the minds of the intelligent, this boy approached, and at his leisure struck the new boy in the face with his clenched fist as hard as he could.

A little afterwards the ringing of a bell summoned all the boys indoors to their books. The new boy crept back to his place at the master's table in a kind of swoon. For the remainder of that day any command of the common faculties which, under happy conditions, he sometimes enjoyed, was destroyed. He could hardly see, he could affix no meaning to that which he heard; the functions of speech and memory were denied to him altogether. Whenever the school-master left the room he followed upon his heels from one place to another with the ridiculous docility of a dumb animal.

At noon the mid-day meal was taken. Many of the scholars then adjourned to a long table in another room, but as the master followed them the boy kept ever by his side. An old woman who cut the food, and who seemed to wield great authority, said to him in a harsh voice, which made him tremble,

"You have no right to sit there. Down there at the bottom is the place for new boys."

"No," said the master, "let him sit with me."

During the meal the boy ate no food. When, having declined to touch a robust helping of meat, he also rejected an even more liberal serving of pudding, the old woman said to him roughly, "You must have a proud stomach if it refuses good food."

After the meal he followed in the steps of the master wherever he went, until the hour came to reenter the school-room to renew the tasks of the day. Many were the fierce and scornful eyes that were directed upon him as again he took his seat at the master's table; yet of these he was not conscious, for he had no knowledge of what was happening about him.

About the hour the shadows of the dismal November afternoon grew so oppressive that it became necessary to light the gas, he saw the form of his father in the door. He gave a little convulsed cry, threw his arms round his father's neck, and buried his face in his coat. His father and the aged master looked at one another without saying anything.

The boy and his father journeyed home on the top of an omnibus. On another occasion such a proceeding would have filled him with a high sense of adventure, but now all the life seemed to have passed out of him. The horses and carts, their drivers, the shouting newsboys, the seething crowds on the pave-

ments, the flaring lights of the shops had nothing to communicate. Yet, when he found himself again in the little room, which he had left only a few brief hours, the sudden joy in recovering that which he had felt to be lost for ever mounted almost to delirium. It soon passed. It was followed by deep dejection, and a sense of strange despair.

The hours of the long evening went very slowly. The ticking of the clock had never seemed so loud and so deliberate. A feeling of lassitude at last began to creep upon him, so that he leant his arms on the table, and pressed his closed eyes upon them. Yet he was not in the least weary, and felt no desire for sleep. His father asked no questions in regard to the doings of the day.

At eight o'clock his father put up the shutters of the shop. It was his habit to sit all day amid the books waiting for customers who seldom came. That day not one had crossed the threshold.

When the hour arrived at which it was usual for the boy to go to bed, he lighted his candle in a dull and mechanical way.

"I suppose, my father," he said, "heroes do not crave for death?"

"Yes, Achilles," said his father, "death is a guerdon they do not seek."

His father accompanied him up the stairs as was his invariable custom during the winter evenings, for he had not the courage to enter a dark room alone.

When the boy had sought sanctuary in his cold bed, his father left him with the light burning at its fullest.

It was in the small hours of the morning when his father entered the chamber again. The boy lay wide-eyed, with his head pillowed upon his hands. He was gazing through the curtainless window at the bright stars. Thus did he lie all night very cold and still, but at six o'clock, when his father left his side to light the fire in the little room and to clean out the shop, he had fallen into a light and troubled rest. Later, when his father returned to bid him rise, he found that sheer fatigue had at last overcome him, and that his broken sleep had changed to a slumber that was deep and dreamless. It was only by shaking that the boy could be induced to open his eyes.

"You will be late at the school, Achilles," said his father.

The boy gave a little faint shiver, and for an instant he cowered among the warm blankets in terror and dismay. In the next, however, he had left his too-pleasant refuge. He clothed his tottering limbs, yet they were so weak that he could hardly walk down the stairs. He took a deep draught of milk, of the inferior London kind, and again accompanied his father through the press of traffic to the house in the gloomy square. Throughout the journey neither spoke.

The incidents of the day were much like those of the previous one, except that his father and the

aged master did not re-enact their former interview. As on the day before, the boy sat at the master's table, and followed him wherever he went. The aged man continued to show him much consideration, while his voice, as it became familiar to the boy's ears, seemed to grow even gentler and more melodious. Yet the eyes of the boys who sat opposite seemed to grow increasingly scornful and fierce.

The days passed with little change from this order. The boy's pallor deepened, and his cheeks grew more gaunt than when he entered the school. Sometimes when he returned to the little room in the evening, still in his father's care, he would be so overcome with weariness that he would lay his head on the table and fall asleep. He ate little; and the previous brightness of his childhood, his frank and insatiable curiosity, gave place to a settled air of lassitude, weariness and dejection.

Once or twice upon returning to the little room he would appear to have been invigorated by some incident of the day, which yet he did not mention. On these infrequent occasions he would seem to have a little appetite for his food, and he would read in some of the less familiar of the ancient authors under his father's guidance.

Sometimes when his father went to rest in the midnight hours he found the boy kneeling at the side of the bed in his white gown. On one occasion, when the boy was too overborne to take off his own clothes, his father helped him to do so. In removing them

his father observed the right arm to be much swollen, and to be greatly bruised and lacerated. His father affected not to notice its condition.

The boy was unfailing in his attendance at the school. Every morning at the same hour he went forth in his father's care; at the same hour every evening he returned in the same vigilant custody. Days grew into weeks, weeks grew into months, months into years, but the intimacy of time, and increase in stature and understanding opened up no intercourse with the other boys in the school. He still remained one apart at the master's table. The contemptuous disfavor with which he was viewed upon his first entrance into their midst grew into a tradition which all respected, so that even those who came after him, who were his inferiors in years and stature and knowledge of books, were only too eager to accept the verdict which had been passed upon him. By this pious conformity they gained the freedom of their own republic.

As the boy grew older his reading in the ancient authors became more prolonged, more profound, and more various. The longer he spent at his books, the more authors with whom he entered into an acquaintance, the more was his curiosity inspired. The questions he put to his father in the little room increased greatly in number and magnitude. Some were so delicate that his father, although familiar with many authors in many tongues, was fain to hesitate in his replies; yet, whenever he was able, he would give an

answer that was tempered, not to his own experience, but to that of his questioner.

One evening, when the boy had been nearly two years at the school, he asked his father, who observed that his eyes were much swollen with tears recently shed, "When pain hurts us bitterly, my father, must we still continue to praise the Most High?"

"Pain is a monitor whose zeal is sometimes a little excessive, beloved one," said his father.

"Is it our own incontinence, my father, that makes our fear so great? There seem to be two opinions among these authors."

"When nature is affronted," said his father, "she utters protests that all must heed. The wise do not shun her indignation, neither do they court it; but, when they come to suffer it, they seek first for the cause, and then for that which may remove it."

"And having found the cause, my father, and also that which may remove it, must they ever shrink from the task?"

"Never, Achilles," said his father.

The boy rose from his chair at the table. His face was like death.

"Do you mind kneeling with me here, my father?" he said. "I seem to do better when you are at my side."

The boy and his father knelt together in the little room.

All that long night the boy never closed his eyes.

He lay on his pillow looking at the brightness of the stars. After a while he tossed restlessly from side to side. His lips were parched; his cheeks burned; his mind had an intolerable vivacity.

At the first faint streaks of dawn he staggered from his bed, dressed his faint limbs, and crept down the stairs. Presently, when his father rose, he found him sharpening upon a stone a large knife, which was used for cutting bread. Observing the boy's deadly white cheeks and burning eyes, his father placed his hand on his shoulder saying, "I trust, Achilles, you are aware that there are remedies from which there is no appeal."

The face of the boy showed that no appeal was desired. He partook neither of food nor drink at the frugal breakfast; and when his father, as was his custom, made ready to accompany him to the school, he said, "I think, my father, I must walk alone to-day. I am twelve years old to-day."

"As you will, Achilles," said his father, as he replaced his hat on the peg.

It was with the greatest difficulty that the boy reached the school. He had a perfect acquaintance with every step of the way. The name of every street was engraved in his memory in its proper sequence; he knew by heart almost every tradesman's sign; yet it was only by the aid of others that he ever reached the school. When he came to the wide crossings, where the traffic was endless, his courage deserted him, and do what he would he had not the

physical power to leave the curb. He remained upon the verge of the crossing for more than half-an-hour, reduced to tears of dismay at his own futility, until an old woman happened to observe him and led him across the street. No sooner had he come to the other side, than, without venturing to thank her, he started to run as fast as he could, pursued by an agony of shame.

Upon his arrival at the school he provided delight and astonishment for his fellows by breaking down in those tasks in which his proficiency had long been remarkable. At each fresh attempt he failed the more miserably. From the first his skill in the classic authors had been so great that it was thought by the others to be discreditable; yet this morning they rejoiced to find that it had passed from him altogether. When at last, in his humiliation, he burst into tears, they raised a shout of laughter.

"The power will return to you, my dear Achilles," said the aged school-master softly. "It will be the greater for having been denied you altogether."

In the play-hour the others gathered round him with their taunts. The heavy boy with red hair, who from the first day had shown the greatest assiduity in beating him, said, as he winked at his laughing companions, "Watch me tickle up the biggest dunce in the school."

However, almost as soon as he advanced, with his ruthless hands outspread, he recoiled with a cry of

fear. His victim had suddenly produced a large knife from his coat.

"If you make me cry out again," said the boy, in a slow and quiet voice, "it is my intention to kill you."

All stood gaping with amazement and horror, and the boy's face was so strange that at first none ventured to come near him. At last the oldest boy in the school, who was also the boldest, crept round behind him cautiously, swooped upon him and pinioned his arms. There and then, with the knife still in his hand, they dragged him into the presence of the master.

The old man, very infirm and half blind as he was, could not understand their clamor at first. But when that which had occurred was rendered clear to him, he ordered every boy to his place. Then addressing the heavy boy with red hair, he said, "Come to me, Enceladus."

A deep silence, the fruit of curiosity, was maintained while this boy lurched up to the master's table. He wore a smirk of satisfaction upon his face, as one who, unaccustomed to notoriety, has come to taste it suddenly.

"Enceladus," said the aged master, in so sorrowful a voice that it sank into the hearts even of those who were accustomed to heed it least, "you are rude and unmannerly. Take up your books and leave us. Never, upon any pretext, must you come among us again."

The boy with red hair, insensitive and slow-witted as he was, was as if stunned by this public and totally unexpected humiliation.

"Why, sir," he whimpered, "why, sir, it was not I who drew the knife."

A burning sense of injustice caused the head boy of the school to rise in his place. He it was who had pinioned the arms of him who had dared to hold such a weapon.

"No, sir," he cried, "it was not Enceladus who drew the knife; it was Achilles."

"Mnestheus," said the aged master, addressing the head boy with a stern melancholy that none had heard on his lips before, "you are declared unworthy of that office to which you have been called. You, also, here and now, must go from among us, and never, Mnestheus, must you come among us again."

Silence and consternation fell upon all as their two companions, thus excommunicated, passed for ever out of their midst.

From that hour the many wanton acts which had been practiced upon the boy were practiced no more. In lieu of the fierce contempt with which he had been previously regarded, they began to pay him a kind of respect. This immunity from physical violence, which he enjoyed for the first time, was even tinged with a kind of homage. It was in nowise due to his extraordinary pre-eminence in books, but rather in spite of it, for it was hard for such unworthy attainment to be condoned. Indeed, this tolerance was ex-

tended to one who had dared to enter upon a course that had not been possible to the boldest among them.

"Tell us, Achilles," they demanded in excited tones, "did you intend *really* to use the knife?"

"Y-yes," stammered the boy, as the blood fled from his cheeks; "h-had I b-been m-made to cry out again, I had buried the knife to the hilt in his heart."

From this time forth it was remarkable how one who had been deficient in every quality which permits a human creature to dwell among his kind upon equal terms, began to acquire an ascendancy over them. His physical shortcoming seemed to grow less apparent. His timid disposition, whose extravagant fear of others had made him their prey, now grew amenable to a new faculty which was suddenly born within him. He who had been despised as outside the pale of their intercourse, found himself clad in a kind of authority, which sometimes he dared to exert.

Nevertheless, this change found little reflection in the natures of those who had persecuted him. At heart they remained as they were before. This innate ferocity was shown the more particularly in their attitude towards the aged school-master. Each day the old man seemed to fail more visibly in years. His eyes grew so dim that he could hardly walk without a guide. He became so deaf that he could not hear the loudest words that were spoken. So feeble was his frame that it could scarcely totter from one room to another.

Of these circumstances his pupils took a full advantage. They fought among themselves continually, and indulged in rude play in the master's presence. They caricatured his infirmities, and made grimaces at him. Sometimes they would pester him with sticks; they would pelt him with balls of paper, or spill ink over him, or secretly fasten his coat to his chair. One boy stretched a cord across the door in the hope that the old man might trip over it; another boy wrote "Doddering old fool" in chalk upon his back.

Such a pitiable weakness was taken as the proclamation of a perpetual holiday. For many weeks not a task was performed, since, although the master was able to call on each boy as formerly to read aloud his task, he had no longer the power to discriminate between the true and the false. Thus scope was given for their natural love of parody. One would read in lieu of a passage from Homer the report of a cricket match from a newspaper; another would substitute "Dick Deadeye's Adventures among the Red Indians" for the Metamorphoses of Ovid; while a third would incorporate the description of a crime in the "Police Gazette" with the poetry of Virgil and Wordsworth.

One boy alone remained faithful to the precept of this aged man, and it was he who still sat at the master's table. He only maintained his obedience; he only abstained from casting indignity upon impotent old age. On more than one occasion the boy, timor-

ous by nature as he was, was almost moved to a rage of tears by some more than usually wanton jest. Once he rose from his seat and cried in high-pitched tones, "Shame upon you all, that you have no mercy for the infirm."

This outburst was received with derision. A little while before, had the boy dared to make it, he would have been requited with blows.

During this time the numbers who came to the school diminished steadily. Many of the boys ceased to attend, and no new scholars appeared to take their places. But the aged school-master sat still at his post, although his eyes grew dimmer and dimmer, his hearing duller, his limbs feebler. One morning as he called the roster and marked only nine as answering to their names, he said, "Our numbers are not what they were. Nine is our smallest muster in sixty-eight years."

"Have you kept this school sixty-eight years, sir?" said one of the nine, with an air of incredulity, and making at the same time a grimace for the amusement of his eight companions.

"Sixty-eight years, Amphistides, have I kept this school," said the old man.

"You must be getting on in years, sir," said Amphistides, with mock gravity.

"I am ninety-four years of age, Amphistides," said the master; "ninety-your years of age. I have seen many and strange things."

"Yes, sir, you must have done," said Amphis-

tides, leering all about him; "and I suppose you will retire on your fortune on your hundredth birthday?"

"If Nature has bowels, Amphistides," said the old man, "she may spare this frame from such a term. Yet, as I say, Amphistides, my life has seen many strange things. It has run its course in the most wonderful era of which history has kept the record. It has seen steam and electricity annihilate time and space. It has seen bombshells and anæsthetics, and devices of a most wonderful character arrive upon the earth. It has seen new forces dragged out of the bosom of nature. It has seen time forced to yield his dread secrets. It has witnessed the overthrow of many creeds. It has witnessed the mind of man pass through many phases. New dynasties has it seen arise; new planets has it seen appear in the heavens. It has seen death robbed of its terrors, and birth bereaved of its sanctity. It has been taught to read the past like an open page. And now, Amphistides, it only remains to commit these limbs to the quiet earth."

The latter part of this queer utterance could scarcely be heard for the thin, piping tones of the aged school-master were drowned by the boys exclaiming to one another, "What an old babbler he is! He is like a baby without its nurse."

From this time even the slender number of boys that remained began to grow less. And at last came the day when there was only one boy left in the

school. He was the boy who had sat continually at the master's table. And one day, as he sat transcribing a favorite passage out of the ancient authors, two rough and coarse-looking men entered the room rudely and noisily. Without ceremony they begin to strip the walls and to uproot the desks, which were clamped by pieces of iron to the floor. Having removed these, they took away the chairs and tables, and other pieces of furniture. Then they came to demand the table at which the boy and the aged master were seated side by side.

"Now then," said one of the men roughly to the old man; "give us this table and these two chairs. You have paid no rent for a year."

The aged school-master did not answer.

"He must be deaf," they said to one another.

The man who had first spoken repeated his words in a louder and coarser tone.

"He must be asleep," he said.

Yet, as they continued to speak to the old man without receiving an answer, they began to address their questions to his stark visage and his curious posture. They shook him by the arms and peered into his face.

"Why," they said, "he looks as though he will never answer again."

IV

THE next few years of the boy's existence were passed almost entirely in the society of his father in the little room behind the shop. He attended no other school, but devoted many hours in the day to the faded and timeworn volumes which so seldom found a purchaser. He read deeply in books of all kinds, of all ages and countries, for his great hunger for information seemed to grow on what it fed. In the evening, when the shop was closed for the night, and his father came to bear him company, he would spend many hours in putting questions to him. To many of these his father would smile in the secret and beautiful manner of the aged school-master, but would vouchsafe no answer.

On high days and holy days they would walk abroad together. Sometimes they would explore the quarters of the great city; at other times they would seek the country lanes. The boy's partiality was for these latter excursions. He could never divest himself of the nameless dread that seized him in mingling with these vast acres of bricks and mortar, of immitigable noise, of unfathomable dirt, and, above all, of his horror of the mighty multitude that rendered the streets so terrible. One day as their steps were pointed towards the heart of the great

city, and he was filled with misgiving, he ventured to say, "How I wish, my father, we could walk always where we walked yesterday."

"As it pleases you, beloved one," said his father.

A little afterwards his father hailed an omnibus. They climbed together to the roof, and were borne away by the sturdy horses through nests of cheerless houses, and hives of dismal human creatures, until green fields and tall trees came into view. As they walked in these groves already spread in the mantle of spring, and their feet felt the sweet and bright earth responsive beneath them, the boy said, "Why is it, my father, that we sometimes choose the dirt, the noise, and the darkness, when fair Elysium is so close about us?"

"I have observed, beloved one," said his father, "that you do not always turn to the easy and pleasant authors."

The boy blushed vividly.

"How I wish," he said, with vehement lips, "that I had never asked to come here! We will forsake these groves, my father, which are spread with flowers, which are quick with the songs of birds, and not return to them for many days."

"As you will, Achilles," said his father gently.

In the spring and summer months the boy sometimes rose at dawn to sally out alone into the streets. They were almost free of traffic and street-persons at this time, and when his courage mounted high he was not afraid to move among them. But later

in the day, when the press became so great he could only move abroad mistrustfully, and when the darkness came he only dared to do so in his father's company.

He determined to celebrate his fifteenth birthday with an adventure. On the eve of that anniversary he made up his mind that on the following morning he would buy a newspaper. When it came he went forth soon after dawn, and remained in the streets until nearly eight o'clock. Then it was he encountered a boy standing by the curb with a newsbill spread out before it. He had a bundle of newspapers under his arm, and was bawling lustily. The boy approached with many misgivings, but finding that the newsboy was taller, and that his voice was louder than he had at first suspected, he moved away without venturing to speak to him. However, a little farther off was a second newsboy who was very ragged, who was not so tall, and whose voice was not so loud. This boy he spoke to with an inflexible determination in his heart.

"I-if you p-please for w-what p-piece of m-money will you give me one of your n-newspapers?" he said.

"Hay?" said the newsboy, looking at him in amazement.

With infinite difficulty the boy stammered through his question again.

"Why, a ha'penny o' course!" said the newsboy gruffly as he scratched his head, for an uneasy

suspicion lurked in it that the question was a jest at his personal expense. "Did yer fink they was a quid apiece?"

"I — I w-will purchase one if you please," said the boy. "T-this is a halfpenny, is it not?"

He produced a shilling, and handed it to the newsboy, who gave him a newspaper in exchange.

"I am much obliged to you," said the boy, lifting his cap and moving away hurriedly.

The newsboy stared with open mouth after the rapidly receding figure. He then bit the shilling, spat on it, and inserted it carefully in a hole in his somewhat nondescript nether garment.

"Law lummy!" he said.

The boy hurried back to the little room with the newspaper. Within him was a glowing sense of physical achievement which he tried to repress. As he sat down to take breakfast with his father, he said excitedly, "Thou wilt never guess what I have done, O my father!"

"I am sure, Achilles, I cannot," said his father; and he added, as he placed an arm round the fragile form that was all shaken with excitement, "Whatever you have done, beloved one, I pray that you have not overtaxed your strength."

"I have purchased one of those newspapers they sell in the streets of the great city, my father," said the boy. "See, it is here. I trust, my father, there is no reason why I should not address my mind to

that which is written therein. I am fifteen years old to-day."

"As you will, beloved one," said his father sombrely.

After the meal, when the boy had removed the breakfast things from the table, had cleansed them and laid them by, he sat down to read the newspaper, full of an excited curiosity. As he did so a kind of proud bewilderment came over him that his own personal initiative had brought a thing of such mysterious import into the little room.

He began to read the newspaper at the first word of the first page, at the top corner of the left hand. He read slowly and carefully every word the page contained. He then turned to the next, and continued to go word by word through each of the twelve pages. When he had finished, he found to his consternation that he had not been able to draw a single ray of meaning out of all that vast assemblage of words. After a period of reflection, in which he refrained zealously from mentioning the subject to his father, he proceeded very carefully to read it again. His failure to understand it proved just as lamentable. In his chagrin and dismay he read it a third time, and a fourth; he committed portions of it by heart; he committed other portions to paper. In the evening he said to his father, with a blank face, "Why, my father, dost thou know that I have not the strength of understanding to compre-

bend a phrase of what is written in the newspaper!" His father smiled in his secret manner.

"Can it be, Achilles," he said, "that here is a bow that you cannot bend?"

"My mind is as grass, my father, before the words in this newspaper," said the boy woefully. "I am fifteen years old to-day; I have been able to gather the inmost meanings of some of the authors I have read, and even in diverse tongues, my father, from that which is spoken by you and me. For what reason is it that I do not gather that which is written in the newspapers the street-persons are always reading as they walk the streets of the great city?"

"Is it not, beloved one," said his father, "that these newspapers are composed in the strange tongues of those curious beings who walk the streets of the great city?"

"You would say, my father," said the boy, "that only street-persons can comprehend that which is written in these newspapers of theirs?"

"At least, beloved one," said his father, "to comprehend their newspapers we must become familiar with their language, their nature, and their ideas."

"How I wish," cried the boy, "that I had never purchased a newspaper! How I wish I had never dared to bring it into this little room of ours!"

With a curious repugnance in his face, the boy rent the newspaper in the middle.

This, however, was not the conclusion of the mat-

ter. Although the boy did not refer again to the subject for three days, it was constantly in his thoughts. At the end of that period he said, "He that has a passion, my father, to understand all things, must even understand the contents of a newspaper, must he not? Yet, if he would understand that, must he not first learn all that these street-persons, who darken the great city, are doing and thinking and talking about?"

"The penalty is dire, beloved one," said his father softly, "for all passions that are imperious."

"And why these street-persons walk so fast, my father," said the boy, "and why they look so cruel?"

"He who would converse with the book of their wisdom must not shrink from their knowledge, beloved one," said his father.

"Yet one such as I must learn to understand all things, my father, must he not?"

"Truly, Achilles," said his father, "the godlike one who aspires to enfold himself in the mantle of heroes must wear the robe of a wide and deep knowledge of all that is under the sun."

"I knew it, my father, I knew it!" cried the boy with gaunt eyes.

He sank his head on the table, breathing heavily.

V

In the afternoon of the next day a slight and forlorn figure left the precincts of the little room. Alone the boy stole out of the shop, that *via media* to the great world out of doors. Timorous of aspect he entered the ever-moving throng in the streets of the great city. At first he hardly dared to look at the faces of the street-persons or to listen to their words; for he was clad in a kind of fear; he was about to pluck the fruit of mysterious knowledge. After awhile, however he took a little courage. Covertly, and in dread lest his woeful ignorance should be discovered, he began to mark the faces of the street-persons, and to listen that he might hear their words. He even grew so bold as to follow two street-persons whose voices were audible in discourse. Others, whom he observed to be lingering in talk on the pavement, he would approach warily. But in spite of this eager pursuit of knowledge he was obliged to confess that the conversation of these street-persons was as unintelligible as their newspapers.

In the course of his wanderings among the streets of the great city, the boy's attention was at last attracted by the most beautiful creature he had ever seen outside his dreams and the pages of the ancient

authors. She was just a common woman street-person in a particularly gay and handsome dress, yet her skin shone like marble, and her hair was dark and glossy like the plumage of some wonderful bird. A little girl, also dressed in great beauty, was at her side. She had an aureole of golden curls, which to the boy seemed all woven of sunbeams and gossamer. They were walking in an opposite direction to that in which he was going, but in a sudden transport of delight at their appearance he turned and followed them.

Presently the beautiful woman street-person and the little girl stayed their steps to look in the window of a huge and brilliantly decorated shop. The interior seemed so dazzling to the boy that it might have been the palace of a magician. While he stood a little way off observing street-beauty preoccupied with the street-beautiful — and he was fain to confess that when closely observed the street-beautiful seemed much nearer to the beautiful of rare and strange authenticity with which he held constant intercourse, than he had ever suspected — a handsome man street-person, wearing fine clothes, sauntered towards the woman and the little girl.

This man also stayed to look in the bright windows of the shop. To the great surprise and curiosity of the boy, who was observing him closely, although this man spoke neither to the woman nor the little girl nor claimed their attention in any way, his hand entered the woman's pocket and took out some article

which he transferred to his own pocket in his closed fist. Then, without in any way attracting the regard of the woman and the little girl, this handsome and finely-dressed male street-person sauntered away from the shop in just the same careless and leisurely fashion in which he had come near it.

A little while afterwards the woman and the little girl entered the shop. Although the boy was awed by the superb nature of its precincts, his timidity was overcome by the most powerful impulse that had ever been excited in him. It was too potent to resist. Therefore he followed the woman and the little girl into the gorgeous interior, devouring them with his gaze.

A second tall and handsome male street-person, also dressed finely, came forward to greet the woman and the little girl. He bowed to them with graceful deference.

"Let me look at one of those *peignoirs* you have in the window," said the woman.

The sound of her voice was so loud and harsh that a cold thrill went through the boy's veins.

"Certainly, madam," said the tall man. "Will you kindly go forward. Straight on up the stairs."

In the middle of the great shop was a broad flight of richly carpeted stairs. The woman, the little girl, and the tall man ascended these. Involuntarily, as if drawn by a magnet, the boy followed them up the stairs.

At the top of the stairs was another great and

glittering room. Here were counters and chairs, resplendent articles of wearing apparel strewn all about; and some other women street-persons, who wore no hats, yet very good to look upon and dressed in neat black clothes. The beautiful woman sank languidly upon a chair. The little girl with the golden curls began to roam about the great room.

Quite suddenly the little girl chanced to see the boy, who stood gazing at her with rapture in his eyes. She walked up to him fearlessly as though he were one of her chief friends. She looked upon him in such a manner of artless simplicity that his cheeks began to burn with gladness.

"I yike oo," said the little girl in a voice so loud and clear that it could be heard all over the great room. "Would oo yike to kiss me?"

The woman half-turned in her chair and looked at the boy coldly and steadily. As his eyes met hers the blood seemed to turn to ice in his veins.

"Come here immediately," she said to the little girl in the loud tone she had used down-stairs to the tall man. "What a horrid-looking boy. He has a sore on his face."

The boy grew petrified with fear and distress. As he reeled against one of the counters, with no more life in him than a stone, one of the women in black came up to him.

"You have no right whatever to be here," she said roughly. "How dare you come in!"

The boy, numb with terror, could hardly apprehend that he was being addressed.

"Miss Sharp," said the woman in black, turning to one who was similarly attired, "fetch Mr. Parley. This boy has no right whatever to be here."

The tall man came up.

"Mr. Parley," said the woman in black, "this boy has been found in this department. Oughtn't he to be searched?"

"What do you mean by coming into this shop?" said the tall man, turning to the boy very roughly.

"I — I — I d-don't think I know, sir," the boy stammered in a voice that was not audible.

The woman with the little girl rose from her chair suddenly.

"Why, where is my purse!" she cried in a tone of angry surprise.

A great outcry seemed to arise all at once. Excited street-persons sprang into being on this side and that. They emerged from behind curtains, doorways and recesses; they came pressing forward until they formed a circle of startled faces around the boy. One and all seemed to be staring with incredulous dismay at an object in their midst.

When the boy had recovered a little from the shock of being addressed in a public manner by street-persons, he began to look about him with a sense of bewilderment, which, however, was quite impersonal. He appeared to be standing in the centre of some strange incident, yet seek as he might he could not

discern its nature. The buzz of eager tongues all around seemed to be discussing, that is as far as he could apprehend the queer language that they spoke, some remarkable creature who in sober verity did not appear to be present at all.

"How shocking it is to see crime stamped on such a young face!" he could distinguish as the indignantly spoken words of the street-woman who had lost her purse.

"I do hope the police won't be long," said one of the women in black.

"You are sure, Miss Sharp, you saw no confederates?" he heard the tall man say.

"There were no confederates," said an angular woman with great impressiveness.

"Ah!" said another woman, drawing a breath of relief, "here's the police."

The burly forms of two extremely dignified and curiously dressed street-persons, whom the boy's knowledge of the practical sciences enabled him to identify as police constables, appeared through the ring of excited faces. After they had held some little intercourse with the bystanders, which to the boy was not intelligible, to his astonishment and great consternation one police constable seized him by the right arm, the other by the left. With much celerity they turned out all his pockets and exposed their contents to view. Then they began to pull him about in a most curious and alarming manner. They twisted his body this way and that. They gripped

him, and shook him, and punched him, and pressed him. They took off his boots and looked into his mouth. The only articles they found in his possession were a handkerchief, four-pence in coppers, and an elzevir volume of Sophocles printed at Düsseldorf in 1640.

"We can't find no purse, ma'am," said the more burly of the two police constables, speaking slowly and heavily, "but no doubt you'll hidentify this?"

He offered the owner of the missing purse the volume of Sophocles.

"I shall identify nothing of the kind," said the woman angrily. "I want my purse; I can't live without it," and then she said with a cold vehemence, "If my purse is not restored to me immediately it will be most serious for everybody. My husband is a member of the Government."

At this announcement a profound sigh appeared to escape the ever-increasing circle of spectators. The excitement depicted in their faces deepened perceptibly.

"Might I ask for the name of your husband, madam?" asked the tall man, with a very grave air.

"My husband," said the woman in a tone which was quite fit to address a mass meeting, "is Lord Pomeroy, the President of the Board of Public Enlightenment."

"Then your ladyship is the Countess of Pomeroy!" said the tall man in a voice of awe.

"I have that misfortune," said the woman, in a

tone still louder than any she had used before. As she spoke she looked round at all about her, and in the act of so doing her eyes seemed to bulge out of her head like those of a reptile.

Each police constable saluted respectfully.

"Miss Sharp," said the tall man, "fetch the manager at once."

The woman in black tore her skirt and knocked down a china ornament, owing to the expedition with which she went forth to do so.

"I beg your pardon, my lady," said the more amply nourished of the two constables, "but I'm afeared we must ax you to prefer a charge."

"I have nothing whatever to do with the charges," said the woman tartly. "I merely ask for my purse; I can't live without it."

"Well, my lady," said the fatter of the two constables, "we can't do nothing unless you prefers a charge."

"These people are concerned with the charges," said the woman, including all present by a comprehensive wave of the hand. "The charges are *entirely* their affair. They must pay all costs. I hold them *entirely* responsible for the loss of my purse."

"Well, your ladyship——"

"Please don't be stupid, constable," said the woman. "One feels it is trying you highly. But if these people prove unreasonable you had better communicate with Lord Pomeroy at 220, Carlton House Terrace."

The throng seemed to grow greater about the boy. The voices of the street-persons seemed to increase in volume and earnestness. By this he was divested of every tremor of fear. All his emotions were merged in wonder and bewilderment, and an overpowering desire to know what would happen next.

An obese and bald-headed man, with superb side-whiskers, who wore a white waistcoat and very bright boots, came forward. His air was a singular admixture of authority and deference. The woman who had lost her purse was now rating the fatter of the two police constables at the top of her voice. The man in the white waistcoat appeared to develop a cough as he stood listening. Once or twice he glanced round at the onlookers, yet affected that he had not done so.

In the meantime the only person on the huge premises who did not seem to be ministering to this spectacle was the little girl with the golden curls. She had strayed away behind one of the counters farther up the room, and was engaged in ransacking several boxes of dolls. Those which particularly appealed to her fancy she stuffed in the pockets of her coat.

After a good deal of argument between the woman who had lost her purse and the more amply nourished of the two police constables, in the course of which the woman said some extremely rude things in an extremely loud voice, all of which were received with

much deference, especially by those to whom they were not addressed, she called to the little girl. Cramming another doll in her pocket that fairy-like creature ran to her mother just as that person, somewhat hoarse and red in the face, led the way down-stairs accompanied by the tall man and the manager, each of whom, for a quarter of an hour past, had been issuing somewhat irrelevant instructions to the woman in black and other subordinates.

Behind these three Olympian figures, yet at an effective interval, came the scarcely less Olympian figures of the two official representatives of law and order, whose portliness of aspect, dignity of bearing, and magnificent self-possession were enhanced by the fact that a frail, bewildered and anæmic-looking boy was in their concentrated clutch. A somewhat incongruous but profoundly impressed assemblage brought up the rear of the procession.

A hansom cab and a four-wheeler were drawn up in readiness at the side of the curb opposite the doors of the shop. Quite a crowd was besieging the pavement, although perfect order was maintained by a small but diligent posse of police constables of the A division. When the owner of the purse emerged from the precincts of the shop each constable saluted with military precision, and then proceeded to hustle stray members of the multitude away from the door. As the woman and the little girl entered the hansom with the aid of the tall man and the man in the white waistcoat, and with the further aid of two police

officers, some of the bystanders removed their hats.

The woman seemed to be a little exhilarated by the proportions attained by the crowd, and also by the respectful warmth of her reception. She stood up in the hansom and addressed the crowd as though it had been a public meeting.

"I hold you entirely responsible for the loss of my purse," she said, looking all around her as if to include one and all in this indictment. "I refuse to pay any charges. Lord Pomeroy will be indignant."

The travelers outside a passing omnibus stood up to listen, and as the hansom drove off with the woman and the little girl to the nearest police station, a man, wearing a "wide-awake" hat and a white tie, called out from the roof of the bus, "Three cheers for Lord Pomeroy!"

They were given heartily.

The more amply nourished of the two police constables then entered the four-wheeled cab. The boy was thrust in after him. The second police constable followed. A third police constable, whose dignity and ample nourishment, assisted by stripes on the arm, seemed even to transcend those of his brethren in the interior, hoisted himself with difficulty on the driver's box, which groaned beneath his weight. As the vehicle moved off slowly, some of the bystanders also groaned.

The police station was round the corner of the next street, some fifty yards distant. The woman's han-

som had been there quite a minute by the time the four-wheeled cab appeared at the rate of three miles an hour.

The woman had deemed it expedient to remain in the hansom until its arrival. The absence of excited onlookers at the door of the police station had been a disappointment to her. It had seemed to be an error of judgment to arrive before the police. And by a curious oversight she had neglected to have a police constable riding in the hansom with her. However, with the consummate generalship gained by a long intercourse with public life she was able to repair this omission. She stood up in the hansom, and after catching the eye of several of the passers-by, called out to no one in particular in her most vibrant mass-meeting accents, "Let the prisoner get out first."

The portly police constable got down from the box of the four-wheeler with an alacrity which a detached observer might have felt to be beneath the dignity of his physical equipment, and communicated this order to those who sat within. It reassured the woman to observe that the door of the police station had opened, and that on its threshold were a police constable and a pale man with a pen behind his ear. A second crowd was beginning already to assemble. As the boy in the grasp of his two custodians was marched into the police station, the woman had the gratification of noticing that by this time a number of eye-witnesses had come round

the corner from the Emporium. Their interest was reassuring.

By the time the crowd on the pavement had grown almost large enough to warrant the woman's descent from the hansom, another pale man, with a pen behind each ear, came out of the police station. The crowd made way for him respectfully. He approached the step of the hansom with the finely considered deportment of one who is accustomed to deal with men and things.

"I am afraid, Lady Pomeroy," he said firmly, but with perfect courtesy, "we shall have to trouble you to come in and prefer a charge."

"I have nothing whatever to do with the charges," said the woman, speaking over his head to the crowd. "I ask for my purse; I can't live without it. If it is not returned to me *immediately* it will give great displeasure to Lord Pomeroy."

However, by this time the woman had seemed fully to decide that the hour was ripe to make a descent from the vehicle. As she did so one of those who had been privileged to take part in the scene outside the Emporium cried, "Three cheers for Lord Pomeroy!"

They were given heartily.

By an impulse which she was powerless to repress, the woman stopped in her triumphal progress to the door of the police station, and bowed and smiled gracefully on all sides.

"Three cheers for the Countess!" was the reward she received.

Amidst quite a display of enthusiasm the woman entered the police station, accompanied by the little girl with the golden curls, who was clapping her small hands with glee. She did not seem to be aware that several of the dolls she had been at the trouble to convey from the Emporium had fallen out of her pockets on to the pavement.

"Wot's up, Bill?" said a male street-person, with a filthy scarf round his neck, to one whose neck was encased less adequately in only the band of his shirt.

"Bin pinchin one o' the unemployed," said his companion, with an admirable assumption of the air of a Christian martyr.

VI

WITHIN the precincts of the police station the boy, still bewildered yet not afraid, was brought to stand in a gloomy room with iron bars across the windows. In this a bald-headed man sat at a desk writing.

"Pearson," said the bald-headed man to a police constable who wore no helmet, "fetch one o' them velvet cheers out o' the horfis for her ladyship."

The bald-headed man spoke in a very dictatorial manner, without looking up from his writing. Upon the entrance of the woman he rose majestically.

"There'll be a cheer for you in a minute, my lady," he said, addressing the woman as though it gave him great pleasure to do so. "Had we knowed you was coming we'd 'a had it dusted."

"It is of no consequence," said the woman, as if she meant it.

By this time her tone had acquired a note of sweetness. She had seemed to be mollified by the manner in which her progress had stirred the great heart of the public.

"I understand, my lady," said the bald-headed man, "that you prefers a charge against the accused of theft from the person at Barter's Emporium?"

"I have nothing whatever to do with the charges," said the woman tenaciously. "I ask only for my

purse. I can't *live* without it. If it is not restored to me immediately it will be most displeasing to Lord Pomeroy."

"On'y a matter o' form, my lady," said the bald-headed man blandly. "Bring the book, Harby. This way, Pearson. Take a cheer, your ladyship."

With considerable stateliness the woman sank on to a chair of purple velvet.

The bald-headed man re-seated himself at the table and opened the book. He turned to the boy with an almost ferocious sternness, which made him shudder in spite of his bewilderment.

"Now then, my lad," he said, "what's your name?"

"I — I — I d-don't think I know, sir," stammered the boy, after this question had been repeated twice.

"Oh, don't you," said the bald-headed man, his ferocity yielding to a sudden pleasantness that seemed even more remarkable. "You don't think you knows? Bring the register, Harby. He don't think he knows!"

The boy's confession of ignorance had conferred upon the bald-headed man a sweetness of manner of which few would have suspected him to be capable.

"Look up 'C,' Harby, vollum six," said the bald-headed man, rubbing his hands with much satisfaction, and then adjusting a pair of pince-nez which hung by a gold cord from his neck. "Open wound on the face."

The woman turned sharply to the little girl.

"Come here, child," she said. "Have I not told you to keep away from that horrid boy?"

Without paying the least attention to the woman, the little girl touched the hand of the boy with a kind of odd confidentialness.

"I yike oo velly much," she said.

"We shall not detain you, my lady," said the bald-headed man, bestowing a studious attention upon his diction. "But I'm afraid we must trouble you to come to see the magistrate to-morrow morning at eleven. The accused will be detained in custody. He has all the appearance of being an old hand. By to-morrow we shall hope to have found out a bit more about him."

"Why don't you give me my purse?" said the woman. "I can't live without it."

"Was a purse found on the accused, Moxon?" said the bald-headed man to the stouter of the two original constables.

"No, sir," said Moxon, "on'y fourpence in copper and a foreign book."

"Hand them to me," said the bald-headed man peremptorily, "and go over him properly."

The boy was taken by two policemen into a room close by. Immediately they began to pull off his clothes. To his extreme horror, bewilderment and shame they stripped him stark naked. They lifted up his heels and passed their fingers between his toes; they held up his arms and pressed their hands

into his armpits; they ran their fingers through his hair, and placed them in his mouth.

"No purse," they said.

They left the boy naked, with all his clothes on the floor. As the door closed behind them he fell senseless on the cold stone. A long and vague period followed, which was veiled from his consciousness by a kind of semi-darkness. During that period he seemed to find himself again in the presence of the bald-headed man, who still sat at his desk and glared at him over the rims of his gold eye-glasses.

The boy had only the haziest knowledge of that which took place; and subsequently was never able to satisfy himself as to whether or not he was again wearing clothes at this interview. At least he had no recollection of having put them on again or of any one else having done so.

The beautiful woman street-person in the gay clothes, and the little girl with golden curls, had gone away. The large and gloomy room smelt very oppressive, and seemed full of police constables.

"Have you a father?" said the bald-headed man. Although all was darkness and confusion about the boy the harsh voice seemed to cause his heart to stop beating.

The boy made some inaudible reply, which finally was taken for an answer in the affirmative.

"A mother?"

A further inaudible reply was taken to be a negative.

"What is the name of your father?"

"'I — I — I d-don't think I know, sir," stammered the boy.

"Now then, none o' that, or it will be 'otted up for you."

The voice of the bald-headed man caused the boy's teeth to chatter.

"What is your father?"

The boy lifted up his strange eyes in dumb bewilderment.

"I think he's a little bit touched, sir," said a very melancholy-looking police constable, tapping his head with his forefinger.

"You think nothing, Gravener," said the bald-headed man sternly. "What right have you to think? You've been in the Force long enough to know that. What does your father do?" he said to the boy.

After a moment a flash of intelligence seemed to fuse the deadly pallor of the boy's face.

"H-he keeps a lot of books," he said, "a lot of books written by the ancient authors."

"Vendor of old books, eh? Where does he live?"

For a moment the dark curtain of incomprehension again descended upon the boy; but quite suddenly it lifted and his mind was illumined with a ray of meaning.

"My father lives in the street of the second among the English authors," he said.

"Now then, now then," said the bald-headed man.

"If you talk in that way I'll promise you it will be 'otted up for you."

"I — I know the author's name quite well," said the boy, disregarding this reproof, for his mind was reverting now to the little room, which already he seemed to have left an epoch ago. "The name begins with the letter M. M — Mi — Mil — it is the street of Milton!"

"Milton Street — vendor of old books in Milton Street. What number?"

"N-number!" muttered the boy blankly. "N-number. Oh yes! The number of the shop of my father is the number of the year in which Ovid was born."

"Hovvid!" said the bald-headed man impatiently. "Who the 'ell's Hovvid? Do you know, Harby, who Hovvid is?"

"Not I!" said a solemn, grey-headed police constable. "Do you know, Pearson?"

"Hovvid!" said a police constable with mutton-chop whiskers. "Can't say as 'ow I do. Sounds like the name of a 'oss."

"Do you mean, my lad," said the bald-headed man, "the number o' the year a 'oss o' the name of Hovvid won the Derby?"

"A 'oss o' the name of Hovvid never did win the Derby," said the police constable with mutton-chop whiskers decisively.

"Ovid is one of the chief among the Roman authors," said the boy. For the moment everything else

had yielded to the astonishment he felt that all these imposing, austere, and strikingly-dressed street-persons should not know who Ovid was.

"Get the directory, Harby," said the bald-headed man, "and look up the year in which Hovvid was born. You were right, Gravener; he is a bit touched."

"Coorse I'm right," said Gravener. "Anybody with 'alf a heye can see that."

"Ovid was born in the year 43 before Christ," said the boy. "The number of the shop of my father is forty-three."

"Then why couldn't you say so at first, my lad, and save all this parley?" said the bald-headed man sternly. "What's in Number One, Harby?"

"A drunk and incapable, and a petty larceny."

"Better put him in there for to-night."

The boy was led into a room somewhat similar to that in which his clothes had been taken off. But this apartment seemed not only larger and more cheerless, but also very much darker. The only means by which daylight could get in was through a narrow window high up in the wall, and this was barred with iron. The few beams that were able to struggle through seemed merely to render everything malign and hideous. The boy, who from his first hour in the world had had an overpowering horror of the darkness, shuddered in every vein when he discovered that he was alone, and irrevocably com-

mitted to it for a nameless term. After the first trance of his terror had passed he was able to discern that a settle ran along the side of the wall. Hardly daring to move he crept towards it. As he did so he stumbled over something. It was warm and soft. Something alive was lying on the floor. It was a shapeless mass. He could hear it breathing.

He sank on to the settle at the side of the wall. He was inert and stupefied. Great cold beads began to roll from his cheeks. He could see and comprehend nothing. Under the dominion of his terror he began to wish for death.

Quite suddenly a voice came out of the darkness.

"What 'ave they pinched you for, mate?" said a low growl in his ear.

He had not been conscious that any other living presence was in the dark room, except that nameless something which was lying on the floor. He was so startled that he gave a little shriek.

"Pipe up, cully," said the low growl in his ear.

The boy's teeth began to chatter furiously, but they emitted no sounds that were coherent.

"Off his onion!" growled the voice, together with a string of blood-curdling expressions, from which the boy was mercifully delivered comprehension.

Presently the voice growled out of the darkness again.

"Got a chew, cully?"

The faculty of speech was still denied to the boy.

Further blood-curdling expressions followed from the other occupant of the bench, who then relapsed into a morose silence.

The boy grew very cold. He trembled violently; yet his heart had almost seemed to stop beating. The darkness and the silence and the strangeness and the loneliness seemed to grow more intense. His mind would hardly submit to the question of what had happened to him. It refused to revert to his father and the little room. He felt that he was never going to see them again.

After a while he slipped from the bench involuntarily. He found himself on his knees on the cold stone floor. He clasped his hands and pressed his eyes convulsively against the piece of wood on which he had been sitting. He began to pray. There seemed to be nothing else to do.

Two hours later a police constable entered and lit a feeble gas-jet high up in the wall. It was protected by a cage of wire. He then gave a kick to the breathing, shapeless thing without a name, which lay in the middle of the stone floor.

With a leer of jocular malignity the occupant of the form pointed to the kneeling figure of the boy.

"Off his onion, mate," he said, with a low growl and expectorating freely.

"Pity you ain't," said the police constable.

The occupant of the form spat upon the boots of the police constable.

The police constable approached the boy, and said, with a sort of rough kindness —

"You can have the *Christian Herald*, my lad, if you'd like it."

The boy neither moved nor answered. He did not know that a word had been spoken to him.

"Told yer, cully," came the rough growl from the form. "He's up the pole."

The police constable walked out of the cell with a greater show of delicacy than that with which he had entered it.

An hour afterwards he came in again carrying two basins of thick lukewarm gruel and a copy of the *Christian Herald*, two months out of date. He found the boy to be still on his knees in the precise attitude he was in when he entered before.

"Balmy!" growled the voice from the bench.

The police constable gave one basin of gruel to the speaker, and placed the other basin and the copy of the *Christian Herald* at the far end of the form, well out of the reach of its occupant.

The police constable touched the boy on the shoulder gently.

"Don't want to disturb you, my lad," he said, "but your supper's waiting for you when you want it. And I've brought you the *Christian Herald* to cheer you up a bit."

No sign came from the boy to suggest that he was conscious that he had been addressed.

The police constable walked out of the cell on tiptoe.

The occupant of the form devoured his basin of gruel ravenously. The sounds that he emitted in so doing were strongly reminiscent of the lower animals. He then rose and fetched the other basin of gruel from the end of the bench, together with the *Christian Herald*. He placed the *Christian Herald* on the floor, and wiped his boots on it with an odd kind of gusto. He then proceeded to devour the second basin of gruel. Afterwards he placed his legs up on the bench, went to sleep and snored lustily.

VII

THE boy had no recollection afterwards of what occurred during the long period which intervened between this hour and that remote one in which he saw again his father's face. How long the darkness lasted and what happened in it he could not tell. He prayed continuously until his flesh ached and his mind grew frail. Yet in the midst of that which seemed to be without a limit, in the midst of an anguish that seemed to have no end, it was borne in upon him that the daylight had come back again.

Thereafter he had a vague knowledge of cold water, other rooms, other voices, more light, and more air. At last he came to understand that he was in the midst of a large place which contained many street-persons who looked very solemn and wore no hats. Far away in front of him he seemed to discern a high desk, at which was seated an elderly street-person with gray hair, a shining bald head and impressive manners. Seated on either side of him were a number of women in gay and beautiful clothes. There was also a number of those odd beings whom he had come to recognize as police constables. And then quite suddenly he saw his father's face.

The pale, noble and serene countenance was looking up at him. It was pervaded by that secret and

beautiful smile which the boy had seen so many times upon it. With a little convulsive shudder of recognition the boy started to run to his father, but as he made to do so he awoke to the discovery that he was enclosed in a kind of cage.

"My father, my father!" the boy called out.

"Keep quiet," said a police constable beside him in a rough whisper.

The elderly gray-haired man at the high-desk lifted up his head in a startled manner, and looked about him.

"Remove that man from the court," he said.

He thrust out a finger straight at the boy's father. With his heart beating faint and small, the boy watched his father vanish out of his ken. He passed out through a side door in the custody of two immense police constables.

"My husband, Lord Pomeroy," said a woman who sat next to the elderly man with the gray hair and the impressive manners, "my husband, Lord Pomeroy, is much displeased that my purse has been stolen, and he would be here personally to express his displeasure had he not been commanded to Windsor unexpectedly."

These words, very loudly spoken, seemed to provoke a kind of joyful flutter in the breasts of all present. Even in the breast of the boy it provoked a flutter, yet not perhaps of a similar kind. It was the sound of the loud and harsh voice itself which to him was of sinister omen. As in an agony of re-

membrance he felt what this voice denoted, the blood ran as water in his veins.

"I am sure, Lady Pomeroy," said the man with gray hair in a most silken manner, "in your misfortune you are entitled to every sympathy from this court. May it trust that there was nothing of great value in your purse."

"Oh dear, *dear* no!" said the woman emotionally, "there was nothing *whatever* in my purse, but I can't *live* without it."

"Quite so, just so," said the man with gray hair. "The court appreciates that perfectly. It feels you are entitled to every sympathy."

"Pray what is the use of sympathy, my dear good man," said the woman petulantly, "if it doesn't restore my purse?"

"Precisely, dear Lady Pomeroy," said the man with gray hair, "your concern for your purse is most natural."

At this stage in the proceedings the man with gray hair gave a kind of benevolent signal to a sedulous-looking man, whose hair was very glossy, who sat immediately opposite to him, and who at this moment was engaged in sharpening a lead pencil.

"But, dear Lady Pomeroy," said the man with gray hair, speaking very slowly and with his eye fixed on the man opposite, "sympathy is not necessarily barren, even if it is not fertile of visible result."

Upon the utterance of these words, an extremely

intellectual looking police constable, who was stationed in the centre of the crowded room, broke into a sudden and totally unexpected guffaw of laughter, which he turned into a cough with equal suddenness and great dexterity. His action incited the row of gaily dressed females to give vent to a little melodious cackle. These in turn seemed to incite the man who had been sharpening the lead pencil to write furiously. And all these portents having assured the man with gray hair that his memorable utterance had passed into history, he composed his features into a form of polite expostulation that words so trivial should have achieved that destiny.

Much passed between the woman with the loud voice and the man with the gray hair and the impressive manners. All, however, went unheeded by the boy; for during the whole of the time he stood clutching at the wooden rail by which he was surrounded, in order to save himself from measuring his length on the floor. To every other person in the court, however, the intercourse of the woman with the loud voice and the man with gray hair seemed to be fraught with a high significance.

Presently the constable who stood beside the boy gave him a sharp nudge.

"Now then," he whispered truculently. "Pull yerself together. His washup is a-speaking to you."

The boy was able to observe that the man with gray hair and impressive manners was wagging a short and fat forefinger in his direction. He also

appeared to be speaking with a kind of stern deliberation, but the boy failed to appreciate a word that he said.

This homily, however, proceeded for some time; and in the course of it all present were much impressed. The man with gray hair and impressive manners concluded his discourse somewhat in this fashion: "Owing to the humane clemency which has been exhibited by Lady Pomeroy, a clemency, I may say, which is so familiar among all grades of society as to stand in need of no advertisement from this court"—("Hear, hear," in a suppressed but perfectly audible whisper from a voice at the back)—"there is no undue desire to press this charge. William Jordan, as this seems to be the first occasion on which you have appeared before this court, and as I am informed that no record of a previous conviction stands against your name, you will at the express desire of Lady Pomeroy"—("Hear, hear," from the voice at the back)—"be dealt with under the First Offenders Act. After entering into recognizances to come up for judgment if called upon, you will be discharged. It is deemed advisable, however, that you should have an interview with the police court missionary. In conclusion I hail this opportunity of tendering the most sincere thanks of the public to Lady Pomeroy"—("Hear, hear," from the back)—"for the public-spirited manner in which she has come forward to discharge a duty which must have been peculiarly distasteful to her."

While the row of gaily dressed women rose wreathed in smiles, and formed a cordon round the man with gray hair and impressive manners, in order to shake hands with him, the boy was led into an adjoining room. In the next instant he was shuddering convulsively in the arms of his father.

A sad looking man with cadaverous cheeks and sunken black eyes came up to them. With an odd kind of compunction he laid his hand on the boy's sleeve.

"What is *he* doing here?" he said.

The boy's father enfolded the questioner in his secret and beautiful smile.

"You ask a question which admits of no answer," he said.

At the sound of the voice of the boy's father, the man with the cadaverous cheeks recoiled a step. His sallow face flushed a little. With the *naïveté* of a child he peered into the eyes of the boy's father.

"I think, sir," he said, with a curiously humble gesture, "I think you are perfectly right."

VIII

From that time forward and for many days the boy did not venture again out of the little room behind the shop. And at night he could not bear to be out of his father's company, so that he never went to bed without him, but sat reading in the ancient authors, or staring into vacancy with his chin propped on his hands. On some evenings after the shutters of the shop had been put up at eight o'clock, and each had partaken of his frugal supper, his father would take down from the shelf on the wall the old and massive volume in which he read so diligently.

The boy had never sought to read in this volume, because although he had always viewed it with the greatest curiosity, and had even seen when it lay open for his father's perusal, that its pages of vellum were covered in close and faded, and almost undecipherable writing in red ink, he had felt instinctively from his father's manner in regard to it that the contents were only for his father's eyes.

One night, however, long after the hour of midnight had chimed out from the clocks of the neighboring churches, and his father had been reading in the old volume with a fidelity that seemed even greater than his wont, the boy could stifle his curi-

osity no more. This was owing to a strange incident that befell. Towards the dawn of the summer morning, his father, who had not allowed his eyes to stray from the book for many hours, rose from the table suddenly. There was an expression upon his face that the boy had never seen before.

His father went to the cupboard which was let into the wall, into which, owing to some occult reason that had never even shaped itself in his mind, the boy had never sought to peer. Therefrom he took a knife which was contained in a case that was very old and chased curiously, a chalice for the reception of ink, and a stylus.

Setting out these articles upon the table, his father took off his threadbare coat, and laid his right arm naked to the elbow. He then took the knife from the case and plunged it into the flesh. As the red blood spurted forth and dripped into the chalice, the boy gave an exclamation of horror and dismay.

"If you have not yet the power, Achilles, to withstand this spectacle," said his father in that voice which never failed to calm his most instant fears, "pray turn your eyes away."

Although the boy was on the verge of swooning, for such a sight bereft him of his strength, he continued to look at his father in sore distress.

After his father had allowed a quantity of blood to pass into the chalice, he swathed the wound in his arm in a linen band, opened a blank page in the book, and sat down before it, stylus in hand.

He dipped the pen in the red fluid; he poised it

over the page. For a long time he maintained this attitude, yet not a mark of any kind did the fingers trace on the vellum. At last with a gesture of profound anguish, which filled the youthful witness with terror, he rose, and a kind of moan came from his lips.

"It is not to be!" he muttered.

The fire in the grate was still smoldering, and into this the boy's father cast the contents of the chalice. Then with a religious care he cleansed each of the articles he had taken from the cupboard, and replaced them there.

"Is it that you cannot write in the book, my father?" asked the boy, whose lips were pale.

"Yes, beloved one, it is not yet given to me to write in the book," said his father, with an expression of indescribable agony upon his face. "And yet my years are now beyond threescore."

"Is it that you have never written in the book, my father?" asked the boy in his consternation.

"I have never written in the book, Achilles," said his father. "And I dare not measure the failures I have made."

"Is it the book of the Fates, my father, in which every human person must write his destiny?" asked the boy.

"No, beloved one," said his father. "It is not the book of the Fates. Only the bearers of our name can write in this book. And these have written in it for a thousand years past."

"What is our name, my father?" said the boy.

"I have been asked for it on several occasions by the persons in the streets."

"Our name is William Jordan — yours and mine."

"William Jordan, William Jordan," repeated the boy softly. A look of strange disappointment crept into his face. "William Jordan!" he said, "William Jordan!"

"What's in a name, beloved one?" said his father, with his secret and beautiful smile.

Under his father's patient eyes the look of strange disappointment passed from the boy's face.

"And each bearer of our name, my father, must write in this book?" said the boy.

"It is so decreed," said his father. "And for a thousand years past each of our dynasty has done so, with the exception, Achilles, of you and me."

The boy's heart began to beat wildly.

"Then I, too, must write in it, my father?"

As he spoke the frail and gaunt form shook like gossamer.

"We can but fulfil our destiny, beloved one," said the boy's father. "And it is written that when a bearer of our name ceases to write in the Book of the Ages our dynasty is at an end."

IX

One day the boy discovered that a small brown volume, the Phaedo of Plato, had disappeared from one of the shelves in the shop.

"I bartered it yesterday, beloved one, in exchange for seven shillings and sixpence in silver," said his father in reply to his inquiries.

This unexpected and disconcerting answer made many anxious questions necessary.

"Why, my father, for what reason?" said the boy.

"In order to provide the means of life, beloved one," said his father.

"The means of life, my father," said the boy.

"The food we eat," said his father. "Our clothes, the roof that protects us, the coals for the fire in the winter months."

"Are all these things obtained with pieces of silver, my father?"

"Yes, beloved. We are called upon to pay in substance for all that we enjoy."

The boy grew profoundly silent for a while.

"Does that mean, my father," he said at last, in a choking voice, "that because we enjoy this little room

of ours, we purchase the priceless hours we spend in it by pieces of silver — you and me?"

"Truly," said his father.

"And yet, my father," said the boy, "I have no pieces of silver of my own except those you used to give me when I went forth into the streets of the great city to the school. Neither have I books of my own to yield in exchange for pieces of silver. Can you tell me in what manner I must gain these things? You know, my father," he added very anxiously, "It may befall that this little room might one day be taken away from me, as it once was before, if I do not obtain some pieces of silver of my own."

"There is but one means of obtaining pieces of silver, beloved one," said his father mournfully, "and that is by going forth to seek them in the streets of the great city."

The boy was smitten with stupefaction by these words. They were charged with an import that he did not know how to sustain. But at least they caused a cloud to dissolve which had long pervaded his mind.

"I see, I see," he said weakly; "now it is that I understand, my father, what all these street-persons are doing when they walk so furiously up and down the streets of the great city. They are seeking for pieces of silver."

"Yes, beloved," said his father.

"And it is for that reason that they look so fierce and so cruel, my father. They know that if they don't find some pieces of silver their little rooms will be taken away from them."

"Yes, beloved one," said his father.

"How unhappy they must be, my father, those persons in the streets of the great city," said the boy. "We ought to give them our pity instead of our fear and our hatred. But"—his voice seemed to perish—"does it not mean, my father, that I also must go forth once more into the great city and become a person in the streets?"

As he framed this sinister question he peered into his father's eyes with a look of entreaty, as though he besought him not to answer in the manner that he feared to be inevitable.

"You have spoken truly, Achilles," said his father gently.

The words of his father seemed to embody a sentence of death. His father perceived in what manner he was stricken.

"You see, beloved one," he said, holding the slight frame against his bosom, "nothing whatever can be obtained in this world which for a term we are doomed to inhabit, except by the medium of pieces of silver. The food that sustains us, the clothes that shield us, the roof that defends us, can only be purchased by pieces of silver. Even these heroes, whom you and I consider the first among created things, had to collect

many pieces of silver before they could acquire the materials, and the leisure to perform their most signal acts."

"And, my father," said the boy, "had they not always to have their little rooms in which to read the ancient authors and to seek their knowledge?" He shuddered with a kind of passion. "Yes, indeed, I must go out in the streets of the great city and find some pieces of silver," he said.

X

THE boy was visited by little sleep that night and for many nights to follow. The necessity of adventuring forth again into those streets, the recollection of which ever haunted him like a diabolical vision, was at first more than he could endure. Many were the attempts he made to fare forth yet again, but on every occasion he would turn back all stricken by distress after essaying less than a hundred yards. Yet at each failure the stern need of conquering this deplorable frailty would address him like a passion; and sometimes with a sense of dire humiliation he would be moved to take counsel of his father.

"How, my father, can I make myself obey myself?" was a question he asked many times.

It was not until his father had pondered deeply on this subject that he vouchsafed a reply. And then at last he said, "I fear, beloved, that in your present phase there is only one answer I can give to your question. I fear it will be necessary for you to obtain a little knowledge in the practical sciences before the power will be furnished for you to move out in courage and security into the streets of the great city. Beloved, we will devote a whole year to this study, and we will conduct it together."

During that evening, to the boy's astonishment,

his father went out into the street and brought back a newspaper, an article the boy had never seen in his hand before.

"This is the Alpha and the Omega, beloved one, of that strange world whose mysteries you deem it to be your duty to penetrate," said his father, with his secret and beautiful smile.

From that time forward the boy's evenings were no longer given up to desultory readings in the ancient authors. He bestowed many painful and irksome hours upon the newspaper; and these would have been intolerable had not his labors had the sanction of his father's patient exposition. Day by day its most obscure mysteries were unfolded to him. Yet the more knowledge he acquired the greater his repugnance became. "I hate it! I hate it!" he cried sometimes, with tears in his eyes.

There was another means also by which his father sought to increase his knowledge of the practical sciences. He would accompany him daily into the streets at all hours of the morning, afternoon and evening. He made him familiar with many labyrinths among the highways and byways of the great city. He gave him an insight into many obscure methods of acquiring pieces of silver. He would denote the character of individual persons as they passed by; and above all, he strove to make the boy familiar with the language that was in daily use about him, and with the plane of ideas of those who used it.

In the course of one of these daily lessons his father pointed out a boy kneeling at the edge of the pavement with a box before him, some brushes and a pot of blacking.

"That boy, beloved one," said his father, "maintains his place in the scheme by removing the mud from the boots of the passers-by. Observe him now cleansing those of the man in the tall bright hat. For so doing he will be rewarded with a small piece of silver, and with that piece of silver he will obtain food and a roof for his head."

"I don't understand, my father, I don't understand," said the boy in deep perplexity. "If the man in the tall bright hat gives away to others the pieces of silver he possesses because he is too proud to bear a little mud on his boots, how can he obtain food for himself, and how can he sustain the little room in which he dwells?"

"We will follow in the footsteps of that man," said his father, "and seek to find out the means by which he gains his own pieces of silver in such profusion."

For many weeks the boy's education in the practical sciences was conducted in this fashion; and although at first he lived in a state of deep perplexity, and was often overcome by the feeling that he would never find a key to these bewildering enigmas that made up the life of the great world out of doors, which now for some inscrutable purpose he was called upon to enter, perseverance, study and

devout patience furnished him at last with some kind of reward.

Not less than two years of concentrated effort was necessary ere the boy began to make real progress in the least subtle of the astonishing complexities of that potent civilization of the West as evolved in the latter days of the nineteenth century of the Christian era. But as one slight piece of knowledge after another rewarded his intense application, he seemed to derive some ground of certainty from his successes, so that by the time he was nearly eighteen years of age he had pieced together these hard-won fragments of experience in such numbers that they wove themselves into a kind of fabric of lucid ideas. Endowed with this basis upon which to stand, he felt the hour to be at hand when the courage and the capacity would be his to make some sort of an entrance into the life of men and things, in the actual and visible out-of-doors world.

One evening he said to his father with an almost proud air: "To-morrow, my father, I intend to put to the test all this knowledge that has come to me during my many days of study — that is, of course, my father, if you think I speak the language well enough."

"Yes, beloved one," said his father, with a mournfulness which was in strange contrast with the exaltation of his own mood. "I think by now you speak the language well enough to do so."

"And I am growing very learned in the newspaper, am I not, my father?" he said almost joyfully, for although in his heart he still loathed the newspaper, the sense of achievement in being able to read and to understand the less inscrutable of its mysteries was very high.

"Yes, beloved one," said his father, "I consider your progress is wonderful."

"I observe, my father," said the boy proudly, "that according to the newspaper we purchased this morning — no, no, that is not the true way of speaking — no, I meant merely to say that according to this morning's paper, 'a bright boy is wanted at No. 12, Webster's Buildings in the City.' It is my purpose, my father, to present myself at No. 12, Webster's Buildings in the City to-morrow morning at the hour of nine."

"This is indeed Achilles," said his father. He peered wistfully at the wan cheeks now brilliant with excitement of resolve.

"If you will embrace me, my father," said the boy, "I will go now to my chamber all alone by myself. I am grown so powerful with the knowledge I have gained that I feel as if I may do almost anything."

The white-haired man took the frail form into his embrace.

"I beseech you," he said, as he held him in his arms, "not to demand too much of the strength that

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Nature has lent you. I would urge you not to go out among the life of the great city if you have a single misgiving."

"I have not a single misgiving, my father," said the boy. "I am able to read and to write and to speak the English tongue. I know how to ask the con — the conductor to stop the horses of the omnibus. I can do sums — compound fractions. I am acquainted with most of the streets in the great city. Have I not walked therein alone several times?"

"Well, well, Achilles," said his father softly, "if you have really made up your mind!"

"You do speak the language beautifully, my father," said the boy. "If you have really made up your mind! Why, those are the very words I heard a woman street-person use in Piccadilly yesterday."

The boy took a lighted candle and went up the stairs. This was the first occasion on which he had ventured to do this unattended since the night he had pased in the cell at the police station. But now a new-born sense of power was upon him, the fruit of knowledge. Of late he had made an amazing advance in his studies. He was already beginning to move about the great world out of doors in freedom and security. He had even begun to carry his capacity in his bearing. Only that afternoon a small girl of ten with a basket on her arm had asked him to tell her the time, and also the nearest way to High Holborn. And the proud consciousness was his

that he had performed both these offices with perfect satisfaction to them both.

He lay in his pillows that night with almost the sensations of a conqueror. Who among all the cruel and remorseless throng in the streets of the great city, who were yet so strong and capable and so wonderfully certain of themselves, could have done more. A year ago such an achievement as this would have been beyond his wildest ambitions. A month ago he could not have done it. A week ago it would have been barely possible. As he lay in this flush of valor it occurred to him suddenly that the light was burning at its fullest. There and then he determined, for the first time in his life, to get out of bed and turn it out.

He jumped from the sheets with a bound, fearing to delay. With a touch of the finger the room was plunged in complete darkness. Like one possessed he darted back across the floor and found his way back into his bed. He buried his head deep down under the clothes. He lay there shuddering among nameless horrors, and shuddering fell asleep.

That night his father never sought his couch at all. He sat below in the little room until the daylight came, pondering the contents of the ancient tome. In the morning at seven o'clock when the boy came down-stairs again he found his father still in meditation.

"I have had such dreams, my father," said the boy, and his face was still flushed with the excite-

ment of the previous night. "Some of them were so hideous that they made me cry out, yet all the time I knew myself to be one of the great ones of the earth."

XI

At eight o'clock, after having made a delicate meal, the boy set out on his pilgrimage into the streets of the great city. It was a delicious morning of early spring. The sun stole through its white curtains, playing elfishly on the traffic. The sounds and cries which ascended from the purlieus of this vast open theatre seemed to be mellowed, and to merge themselves in the primal harmony of the unplumbed spaces overhead. Never before had the boy felt such an exhilaration as on this glorious day. He crossed from one pavement to another with wonderful valiancy, sometimes evading the heads of the horses with a feeling that was almost akin to unconcern. He took his way from street to street with the conviction that ever re-affirmed itself within him that he would find his way to No. 12, Webster's Buildings in the City.

In the height of this new power, which for the first time in his life had rendered him fit to move in the great world out of doors, he gave expression to his sense of joy by breaking out suddenly into the reverberating, wavelike music of the Iliad. His lips moved to the measure of those mighty cadences; they rolled out of his mouth, and their song was louder than the thunder of the traffic. As he pressed

ever onwards through the endless, elbowing throng, he knew himself as one with the son of Peleus.

Without once faltering, or one mistake in his course he found himself before the façade of Webster's Buildings in the City as the clocks were striking nine. A moment's reflection showed him which was No. 12. It comprised a suite of offices on the ground floor.

Quite a number of boys of various ages and sizes were waiting on the pavement outside the door. They had formed themselves into a queue. First the boy stood looking at the mystic No. 12 which was painted on the fanlight over the door, and then at the row of youthful faces, which were already regarding him critically. After a moment of hesitation he walked past them and plunged into the interior of the building. As he did so, loud and angry protests arose of, "'Ere, you come back, Barnum and Bailey!" "Take yer turn, yer young swine!" "Give 'im one for himself!"

The boy not understanding to whom this enigmatic truculence was addressed, walked through the dark passage into the first room that he saw, the door of which was partly open. A morose-looking man who was biting a pen was standing just inside it.

The boy took off his hat and bowed low.

"M-may it p-please you, sir," he said, repeating slowly but in strangely timid accents, a speech which he had already carefully rehearsed a thousand times, "I d-desire to offer m-myself in the capacity of a bright boy."

The morose-looking man took the pen out of his mouth with great deliberation, and also with an astonishment which he did not seek to dissemble.

"Do you, indeed?" he said. "We do want a bright boy, but we don't want 'em too bright. You go back and wait your turn, you cheeky young imp."

The boy stood a moment in perplexity, unable to grasp what was implied by this answer, and what, in the circumstances, was the fitting course to pursue. In the next, however, he had received enlightenment. The problem was solved for him by the man with the pen. "D—— your young impudence!" he said, taking him by the shoulders. In the next instant the boy had been run through the passage and flung out on the pavement with the aid of a heavy kick.

His re-appearance and mode of egress were not lost on the select company of bright boys who formed the queue. They seemed to accord them a very decided approval. As the boy stood in bewilderment, with his former morbid dread of physical violence returning upon him, loud howls of derision arose from the queue.

At first it did not occur to the boy that they were directed at himself. But, as he continued to stand before the door in irresolution and surprise, the displeasure with which he was viewed personally was brought somewhat forcibly to his notice. A boy sauntered out from the middle of the queue and collected a handful of mud from the gutter. He

then crept up stealthily behind him, and flung it down the back of his neck.

In spite of this not particularly delicate hint, however, and in spite of the cries of derision all about him which seemed every moment to increase, the boy continued to stand before the door. At last a powerful boy, who was the first in the queue, turned to a companion and said: "Keep my place, Nosey." He then stepped out, and seizing the boy ferociously by the ear, half led and half dragged him to the tail of the queue. After having cuffed him severely, he said, "You get out of your place again, and I'll break your neck."

Humiliation, terror and bodily pain were now added to the boy's bewilderment, but even these potent forces, mighty in combination as they were, could not overcome the new-born strength of purpose that had so recently sprung up in his heart. Doggedly, yet sickly enough, he continued to stand behind the other boys, striving by every means in his power to divine precisely what was taking place around him; and to learn what line of conduct would consort with an immunity from personal violence, and yet further the end to which he had pledged himself.

He stood on the pavement nearly an hour while other boys formed up behind him. Happily none considered it to be worthy of their dignity to visit him with further notice now that his place had been unmistakably indicated to him and his presumption

had been fittingly rebuked. Nevertheless he hardly dared to breathe or to look to the right or to the left lest he should again incur their notice. At last, however, an incident happened which afforded him intense relief.

In the process of time boy after boy in front of him had passed through the sacred door, and then after a brief interval within had returned and had gone away disconsolate, incurring as he did so, from those who still waited, sundry observations whose import the boy found it impossible to fathom. But at last one of these came out wearing an air of somewhat emphatic disgust, and said in a derisive tone to those who yet remained in the queue: "You can all go 'ome. Cocoa's got it. Five bob a week, and a two bob rise every year."

Upon this announcement, the boy was privileged to observe a strange thing. All the other boys, not only those in front of him, but those behind him also, melted away in silence as if by the agency of magic. At first, so great was his relief at finding himself delivered in this miraculous fashion of their presence that he could hardly realize his good fortune.

For the next half-hour he stood where he was, meditating on what course he must pursue. As he did so, there mounted still higher in his mind the paramount necessity of speaking his carefully-rehearsed words to those who were in need of a bright boy. For in the magic dispersal of those ruthless and terrible youthful street-persons he recognized

clearly the hand of Providence. Whatever befell he must force himself to obey the high resolve he had formed the previous night which had now gained the sanction of heaven. If it cost him his life he must present himself again before the man in the office who had already used him so dreadfully.

With a compressed mouth and a stern face, from which he hoped all traces of the mud had been removed by the assiduous use of his handkerchief, although he could still feel it trickling down his back in a most disconcerting manner, he ventured forth again into the dark entrance of No. 12, Webster's Buildings. The door at the end of the passage was now closed. He tapped timidly upon the glass. There came no answer. After waiting a full minute, in which he listened with nervous intensity for permission to enter, he tapped again a little louder. There was still no answer. Mustering up all his courage he tapped a third time as loudly as he dared. Even if he broke the glass he must obtain an answer!

"Come in," said a voice from behind the door.

The boy opened the door and entered hat in hand. In the crowded room was a number of men and boys seated on tall stools. The boy clenched his hands and closed his eyes.

"M-may it p-please you, gentlemen," he said shrilly at the top of his voice, "I desire to offer m-myself in the c-capacity of a bright boy."

In profound astonishment all the men and boys

ceased their labors for a moment. One of them, the morose-looking man, with whom previously he had had dealings, gave a short laugh.

"Oh, it's *you* again, is it?" he said. "Kindly wait a moment until I get to you."

As he spoke, he picked up a heavy and long ruler and descended from his stool. The boy waited in obedience to his request. The man took him by the ear and led him out into the passage, and proceeded to beat him with the ruler brutally about the head and shoulders.

"Do you think we will be plagued out of our lives by the likes of you?" he said, as he flung the limp and breathless form into the street for the second time. "You come here again, and I'll have you locked up."

Bruised, breathless and bleeding, the boy dragged himself away from the vicinity of No. 12, Webster's Buildings in the City. Yet it was only in the flesh he was conquered; his spirit was still fortified with resolve. What were his haps in comparison with those of Hector at the Defence of Troy? Therefore after leaning against the wall of an insurance office for a little time in order to recover some of the physical power which had been so rudely knocked out of him, he determined to renew his attempts to gain pieces of silver. It might be that others besides the occupants of No. 12, Webster's Buildings in the City were in need of a bright boy. Indeed, it was most

likely; at least there appeared to be a large number of bright boys who were desirous of gaining pieces of silver.

Accordingly he resolved to use his powers of observation, and to select for himself a shop or an office which he deemed likely to stand in need of the services of a bright boy. Yet his first choice was not fortunate. After mustering every consideration in its favor, he entered a small and unassuming shop in Gracechurch Street.

As he entered with a curious sensation in his heart, he was met by a young woman with a supercilious lift to her chin and an abundance of dark hair, who looked him up and down as though he had no right to be there.

"What do *you* want?" she said in a sharp tone, and hurting him with her suspicious eyes.

"M-may it p-please you, m-madam," he stammered, "I d-desire to offer myself in the capacity of a bright boy."

"Oh, d-do y-you," said the young woman. "Go home and wash your neck and then go and drown yourself."

The boy slunk out into the street as though she had hit him a blow in the face.

All through the afternoon he wandered up and down the crowded pavements of the great city. In the course of his weary pilgrimage he entered many shops and offices sickly yet doggedly; sickly yet doggedly he made the offer of his services. Some

of the answers he met with were not intelligible; some of them were. Yet in spite of every rebuff, of every conspiracy on the part of fortune, of the increasing sense of bodily suffering, of the aches that stole over his limbs, of the faintness that crept over him owing to these long hours of unaccustomed physical and mental exertion and absence of food, he forced himself to go on. What were such sufferings, such journeyings, such adventures, such vicissitude in comparison with the ten long years in which his beloved Odysseus was banished from the shores of Ithaca! What clay was this that already it should begin to quail? How those great ones of old would have mocked him had he dared to confess to them that he felt distressed!

Yet he did feel distressed. It was almost useless to deny it. As for the tenth time that afternoon, he was told "To take himself off, and to look lively about it," a formula which repetition had enabled him to recognize, and experience had indicated the only course to pursue, despair and humiliation, accompanied by terror, that most active of all his enemies, crept upon him, and as the clocks of the great city were striking five, tears sprang to his eyes. Almost in the same moment he had dashed them away, had proudly overcome them. What if the great Agamemnon could have seen him! How would he be able to meet those mighty ones, how would he be able to grasp their hands, to look into their faces, if this was the measure of his courage?

By this time he had come into Cannon Street, hard

by to Saint Paul's. On the left side of the street, along which he passed, were great blocks of gloomy warehouses. Flights of stone steps ran up to their entrances; and as he limped by one of these, involuntarily he sank down in sheer weariness upon a bottom step. He felt bitterly hungry, yet he had no means of satisfying his pangs, for there was not a penny in his pocket; and the only food he had had that day had been a little milk and bread at eight o'clock that morning. Yet he still fought with all the resolution of which he was capable against the physical weakness which now held him so inexorably in its clutch. Again he began to recite the Iliad under his breath, not now because the joy of battle was in his veins, but because he sought to derive sustenance from those high-hearted ones who looked on valor as their right.

As he sat on the bottom step of the warehouse with his throbbing head pressed against the cold stone, he beheld a heavy railway car drawn by a mighty horse come up with a shattering rattle to the door of the great building. The man who was driving it cast the reins on the horse's neck, and standing upon the dray shouted up into the second story. Thereupon a door was opened in the wall of the warehouse, and a large box attached to the hook of a crane was swung outwards and downwards towards the dray. As the drayman proceeded to assist it on to the dray and to disengage it from the

hook, the mighty horse grew impatient and began to prance.

"Whoa there, you ——!" called out the drayman to the horse.

Standing on the curb at the opposite side of the street watching these proceedings was a small and pale urchin, whose clothes were in rags and whose toes were bursting through his shoes. Suddenly with amazing daring and rapidity he darted between a hansom, two omnibuses and a covered van, and peremptorily seized the head of the great horse.

"Nah then," he said to the horse sharply, "worrer yer at? Kim up."

He gave the great horse a blow on the neck and backed it a yard or two.

"Good kid," said the drayman, unhooking another box from the crane, "hold him there a bit."

The boy seated on the bottom step of the warehouse assimilated every detail of these proceedings. He pondered them deeply. And as he did so, quite suddenly a flash of meaning made his pulses quiver. Instantly he withdrew his throbbing head from the cold stone, and rose heavily. He approached the ragged urchin who was still holding the head of the great horse.

"I — I b-beg y-your p-pardon," he said, addressing the urchin with immense politeness, "but I — I a-assume you will r-receive a p-piece of silver for this brave action?"

"Come again," said the urchin, who was not accustomed to this mode of address.

The boy contrived to grasp that his meaning was not understood.

"The s-street-p-per — t-the m-man on the — on the c-car will give you a p-piece of s-silver because you make the great horse stand still," he stammered, in order to make it clearer.

"Piece o' silver," said the urchin derisively. "More likely to gimme a thick ear. Lucky if I git the price of a fag."

The boy retired to the bottom step of the warehouse with this mysterious piece of information. With infinite pains he had mastered, as far as he was aware, all the coins in the currency; he had come to believe that he knew the appearance and purchasing power of them all, from the farthing to the sovereign, from the halfpenny stamp to the five-pound note. But he had never encountered "a thick ear," or "the price of a fag," in all his researches.

Timidly, reluctantly he went back to the urchin.

"I — I beg y-your p-pardon," he said as courteously as before, "but w-would you m-mind informing me what is the monetary value of the price of a fag?"

"A nickel, o' course," said the urchin in a tone that seemed to indicate that further intercourse was not desired. He was disposed to resent the intrusion of a busybody into his personal and private affairs.

"A n-nickel," said the boy blankly. "W-would you mind in-informing me w-what is a nickel?"

"A brown, o' course," said the urchin, eyeing him sternly.

"Oh yes," said the boy, "one of those brown coins which are called p-pennies. I am much in-debted to you for this in-information."

With a grave smile of thanks the boy lifted his cap and returned again to the steps of the warehouse. After a moment, however, in which he stood in irresolution he limped away along the street. His progress was carefully noted by the urchin, who watched the frail figure solemnly as it proceeded along the crowded pavements of Cannon Street.

"Gawdstrewth!" he exclaimed, spitting with vehemence, and dealing the great horse a further admonitory blow on the neck.

The boy, however, as he limped with his hunger and weariness through the crowd of street-persons who were about him everywhere and who dealt him continual buffets, was under the dominion of an idea. He had gained yet another fragment of practical knowledge by the medium of first-hand experience. He must turn it to account at the first opportunity. He was hungry. That inexorable power in whose hands he was had inflicted that salutary condition upon him in order to make trial of his quality. And what an incomparable sense of power it would confer upon him to feed that hunger for the first time in

his life by his own personal skill in the practical sciences!

A hundred yards along the street was another huge block of gloomy warehouses almost identical with the others. It also was furnished with a flight of stone steps and a crane dangling above a door in the second story. Their similarity, even to the smallest details, enabled the boy to see in the appearance of this second warehouse this same indubitable hand. He sat down as before on the bottom step, and in simple faith proceeded to await the arrival of a second dray drawn by a great horse.

As thus he sat with an exalted patience for that which he knew must come to pass, yet with his limbs trembling so that he could not hold his knees from knocking together, the clock of the cathedral across the street boomed the hour of six. Its august echoes reverberated in his spirit; they filled it with awe; the sense of a remote yet noble kinship overwhelmed him as he sat. He looked across the street with dim eyes; the colossal spire was uplifted sheer, it was lost in the lowering darkness of the sky. The sombre and vast walls of the church seemed to proclaim themselves to his imagination like the voices of heroes upon which it fed. Their ghostliness, for already they were enveloped in the shadows of evening, set his lips again in motion. Involuntarily they began to move to the familiar lines of the Purgatorio:

> Era gia l' ora che volge il disio
> ai naviganti, e intenerisce il core
> lo di ch' han detto ai dolci amici addio;

e che lo nuovo peregrin d'amore
punge, se ode squilla di lontano,
che paia il giorno pianger che si more:

quand' io incominciai a render vano
l' udire, ed a mirare una dell' alme
surta, che l' ascoltar chiedea con mano.

The huge clock of the cathedral boomed again and yet again. His lips still moved softly to the music they emitted. No dray and no great horse had arrived. But his resolve was undaunted; his faith remained inviolate. His frame was growing numb and chill. The stone had grown very cold. The stealthy hues of the night were wrapping themselves about everything. The lamps were now lit in Saint Paul's Churchyard. A serried bank of dark clouds was looming up out of the west. At his heart was a curious sinking; he seemed to feel a little faint.

It still wanted a few minutes to seven by the stolid face that peered at him from across the street, when his devout patience and his simple faith met with their reward. Just as he had foreseen, a heavy dray drawn by a great horse came rattling round the corner of the cathedral. As it neared the warehouse on the steps of which he sat, it began to slow up. Yes, never a doubt about it, it was coming to stand under the creaking piece of iron above his head, the crane dangling from the second story.

This dray stopped precisely as the other one had done at the other warehouse. In a precisely similar fashion the drayman cast the reins loose on the great horse's neck. Again the drayman stood up and

called unintelligible words into the second story. The door opened as before; the crane began to squeak and grunt; the box hung suspended in mid air. Swinging and rotating it descended to the drayman's arms. And then just as before the mighty animal began to prance.

With his heart beating as though it would break him in pieces the boy rose from the bottom step of the warehouse. He pressed his hands to his sides. "Courage, Achilles!" he muttered under his breath, "Courage, Achilles!"

The great horse still pranced. The man on the dray shouted a horrible oath. With flaming eyes and cheeks of death the boy dragged his faint limbs to the curb. As he came near the great animal, and he beheld its scarlet nostrils and huge and wicked eyes, he knew it for a monster of fable that could turn him to stone with its glance. A chill stole through his veins. He extended his hands towards the great horse. His eyes were filled with a dreadful rushing darkness. He felt himself swaying with a kind of sick impotence; it was as though the hand of fate had maimed him.

"Lay 'old of his head, can't yer," the brutal voice of the man on the dray percolated to his ears. "What are yer lookin' at 'im for?"

The great horse lifted its hoofs; the boy reeled back with the face of a corpse.

"Mind he don't eat yer," said a quiet voice at his side.

A second small and ragged urchin, far less in stature than himself and half his years, calmly took hold of the great horse by the near rein, shook it, struck the animal on the neck very boldly, and proceeded to back it just as the other urchin had done.

"Nah then, worrer yer mean by it?" he said, scolding it in a shrill voice like a woman would an infant.

The impassive face upon the cathedral boomed the hour.

In a strange anguish of the spirit, which he had never felt before, the boy staggered away from the warehouse into the ever-gathering shadows of the great city. He did not know where he was. He did not know what he did. He was in the enfolding grasp of an unknown power; he was in the bosom of the gods.

Without apprehension, and without reason, he was borne through the maze of cabs, vans and omnibuses to the other side of the street. He clutched feebly at the chill iron railings that formed a girdle round the cathedral. A bell seemed to be tolling. It filled his heart with voices. An occult force, which had never grasped him till this hour, began to draw this broken wayfarer seeking for sanctuary towards the unknown.

He issued back to a frail sense of entity to find himself on the steps of the cathedral. He saw lights; he smelt warmth; he heard remote and strange music; he heard the hushed clamor of many voices. He was in a vast place echoing yet domeless. He was on his

knees pressing his temples against the cold marble flags.

The deep voice of the organ filled the warmed air with a thousand vibrations. Afar off were bright-burning candles and solemn songs. He pressed his temples closer to the chill flags. He panted like a hunted deer.

Hours later, when he staggered out of the enervating warmth of the cathedral, the night was pitch dark. The chill airs of the evening made his jaws clap together. He did not know where he was. Moving with little tottering steps, his flesh as water, his eyes blind with night, he followed the line of railings that engirdled the cathedral. He clutched at them; he hugged them blindly to his bosom; he was like a mariner in uncharted seas who has lost his compass. He followed the course of the railings, dragging one foot after another almost as one who is bereft of the power of volition. It took him nearly an hour to complete the circuit of the railings, and then he found himself back again at the point whence he had started, the steps of the cathedral.

Still clingng to the railings he started to go round them again. Within him the instinct was paramount that if he did not keep his faint limbs in motion he was lost. He would perish in the streets of the great city. Passing each iron rail in its turn through his numb hands he went on and on, and in the process of time returned again whence he started to the steps of the cathedral.

For the third time he set out to traverse the line

of the railings. He was very cold. Yet the flesh must continue to obey, or that nameless destination which he had ceased to remember would never be won. As before, railing by railing, he made the circuit, and for the third time returned whence he started. Without an instant's tarrying he set out again. The impassive face upon the cathedral boomed the hour of midnight. The dark heavens looked like Erebus. A sharp cold spray of rain was dashed suddenly upon his cheeks.

This blessed succor seemed to give him a flicker of power. "Courage, Achilles!" he muttered faintly. He could not feel his feet as they crept over the wet pavements; they seemed to be poised in the jaws of an abyss. His form seemed to be disembodied in the air of the night. But the flesh was still making its answer; the unending procession of the railings still continued to slide through his hands. Yet his fingers could feel nothing. How soft and vague everything was growing! A delicious softness had begun to creep out of the sharp airs of the night.

As his eyes were closing he grew conscious that a pair of arms were enfolding him.

"My father," he muttered, "my father."

He pressed his closed eyes against a garment which was wet yet protective. He was lying against his father's bosom. His father had followed in his steps as he set out in the morning, and had never been more than fifty yards from him during the whole of the day.

XII

The next day the boy returned to the study of the practical sciences under his father's guidance. The brief hour of self-reliance, of actual motive power, seemed to pass almost as suddenly as it had come. Yet although he had been ground down into the dust again, the sap and fibre had appeared to increase in his frame. He went alone no more into the streets of the great city in search of pieces of silver, but the need of obtaining them by his own address was never absent from his thoughts.

One sultry evening of midsummer, when he returned to the little room after a dusty and stifling pilgrimage about the streets in his father's company in the pursuit of knowledge, he said with an air of mournful conviction, "Each day makes it more clear to me, my father, that if once our store of silver pieces should fail us, we shall lose this little room of ours. Every time I walk abroad in the great city I see numbers and numbers of these poor street-persons whose sad faces tell me that they have lost their little rooms."

His father, although he would have sought to deny this assertion, was yet not able to do so.

Indoors and out of doors the boy pursued his studies with a most vigilant constancy. He read

the newspaper daily, and committed portions of it to memory. And he accompanied his father all about the streets of the great city. He accompanied him into the most inaccessible places, using his ears and eyes faithfully. And at last, it occurred to him that if there was no place for him in the universal scheme in his capacity as a "bright boy," a special dispensation might permit him to enter some other sphere of usefulness. For example, in one of the advertisement columns of the newspaper he had observed that in addition to cooks, clerks, office boys, coachmen, commercial travelers, hairdressers' assistants, and laundryman's apprentices, who were required by various people, there was also a handy youth wanted by Messrs. Crumpett and Hawker, Publishers, 24 Trafalgar Square. Apply by Letter.

"Would you say, my father?" he inquired anxiously, "that I have credentials to fulfil the capacity of a handy youth. I am eighteen years and twelve days old; I can wash and scour the utensils in which we cook our food; I can make the fire and polish the hearthstone, and also the fire-grate; I can cleanse the bricks of the floor. And, my father, I can remove the dust from the chimney-piece; and I constantly dust and arrange the books in the shop. Would you say it would be presumptuous to offer myself in the capacity of a handy youth?"

"I think, beloved one, you are quite competent to take this course," said his father sadly, "if you can find the courage."

"I think I can find the courage, my father, if you

will help me a little," said the boy, with his bright eyes gleaming out of his gaunt cheeks.

They knelt together in the little room.

That evening the boy took pen, ink, note-paper and envelope, and with infinite pains composed his first letter. In a very dainty and delicately written hand it ran as follows —

"To Messrs. Crumpett and Hawker, Publishers,
24 Trafalgar Square.

"GENTLEMEN,

"It is my aspiration to serve you in the capacity of a handy youth. Should you deem me worthy of your trust, it shall be my constant aim to render myself worthy of it.

"I have the honor to be, Gentlemen, your obedient and respectful servant,

"WILLIAM JORDAN (the younger)."

He showed this composition to his father, who approved it in silence. Then he stole out all alone into the darkness almost breathless and confided it to a letter-box in the street.

Such an adventure as this had the power to tantalize and excite him. When he sought the ancient authors as a refuge from the insurgency of his thoughts, his mind could no longer feel the spell of their magic pages.

"I pray that the postman will carry the letter to its true destination, my father," he said anxiously.

"It is on the knees of the gods, Achilles," said the white-haired man.

XIII

By an odd fatality the postman did carry the letter to its true destination, and on the evening of the following day his peculiar tap was heard at the letter-box on the door of the shop.

Pale with excitement, the boy rose from his book.

"A letter!" he cried. "There is something here in my heart, O my father, that tells me it is from Messrs. Crumpett and Hawker, Publishers, 24 Trafalgar Square."

He groped his way through the darkness of the shop, and placed his hand on the letter-box on the outer door. Yes, there was a letter. As he bore it to the light of the little room, it seemed to sear his fingers. It was addressed to "Mr. William Jordan, Junior, 43 Milton Street, E.C." On the back of the envelope was stamped "Crumpett and Hawker, Publishers, 24 Trafalgar Square."

He tore the letter out of its envelope. His heart seemed to stand still. The letter said —

"Messers. Crumpett and Hawker will be obliged if William Jordan, Junior, will wait upon them tomorrow (Wednesday) morning at twelve o'clock."

After pressing his lips to this typewritten communication he gave it to his father.

"There, my father," he said, with a devout sim-

plicity, "I knew it would be so; it was written in my destiny."

His father read the letter, and handed it back to him. He could not find a word to speak; neither did he direct a glance at the exalted face.

Presently they knelt again together in the little room.

That night of all nights it was not to be expected that the boy would close his eyes. As he lay in his bed with his gaze ever reciprocating the curious brightness of the stars, he speculated at times on what the morrow would bring forth; at other times he reviewed the sum total of his knowledge in the practical sciences. He composed carefully, word by word, the phrases he must use on the morrow to Messrs. Crumpett and Hawker; he rehearsed in a soft voice, with his rapt eyes ever fixed on the fragment of the empyrean that shone through the curtainless window, in spite of the gables and chimney-stacks which tried so hard to shut it out, the manner in which these words must be spoken. In the middle of the night, as the clocks were chiming three, he rose from his bed, and walked about the darkness with bare feet and clad only in his night-gown, muttering in his gentle voice, as he clenched his hands, "Courage, Achilles!"

At five o'clock he rose and put on his clothes. Descending the stairs he cleaned the fire-grate, made the fire, whitened the hearthstone, and scrubbed the floor of the little room. Then in a vain endeavor to

allay his excitement he read some of the pages of the ancient authors that he cherished most. At the breakfast hour he refused a delicate piece of bread-and-butter that his father cut for him, but drank a copious draught of milk. At nine o'clock he requested his father to accompany him to have his hair cut.

No sooner, however, had they come to the end of the street than the boy suddenly stayed his steps.

"No, no, my father," he said, with a look that was almost imperious. "I would have you return to the shop. This day I must walk alone."

"As you will, Achilles," said his father, turning upon his heel.

An instant later, however, the white-haired man had turned again to watch the frail figure cross the street and enter a hairdresser's shop.

XIV

At eleven o'clock the boy set out for No. 24 Trafalgar Square. During the small hours of that morning his scheme of action had been planned to the most minute detail, but so weak is the human character even in the highest moments of its resolve, that on the very threshold of this enterprise, which the boy knew to be the foremost of his life, he departed in an almost wanton manner from this program upon which he had spent all the powers of his mind.

His visit to the hairdresser; the triumphant effrontery with which he had asked for his locks to be shorn; the calm fortitude with which he had submitted to that searching and public operation; the self-contained manner in which he had given the hairdresser street-person a large piece of silver for his great kindness and courtesy, all these achievements had conspired to imbue him with a valor, which at the very outset of his venture was destined to lead him into an unwarrantable, an almost foolhardy course.

At the corner of Milton Street, at its juncture with an extremely busy thoroughfare which he would be compelled to traverse, there was a recognized

halting place for those wonderful vehicles called omnibuses. At this corner it was their custom to discharge and to accept passengers.

As he came to the corner an omnibus, painted a bright yellow, chanced to be standing there. At the sight of it, inflamed with a valor that was almost insolent and without pausing to reflect upon what his act involved, he walked, almost with vainglory, straight into the 'bus. Never before had he dared to enter one alone; such a deed was far from being contemplated by that program to which he was pledged to adhere; but he had cast the die before he had reflected upon his recklessness, and like an authentic hero in an entrancing tale he was being drawn by two stout, but comely horses to No. 24 Trafalgar Square.

When the conductor came round for the fares he said to him in a voice that was a little timid in spite of its boldness, "W-will y-you p-please stop the omnibus at No. 24 Trafalgar Square."

"Don't go to Trafalgar Square," said the conductor curtly. "Charing Cross Station."

This was dreadfully unexpected.

"W-would y-you m-mind asking the h-horses to stop, if y-you p-please," he stammered.

"Can't yer jump off?" said the conductor sharply.

"Oh n-n-no," said the boy.

"S-s-stop where you are then," said the conductor.

A girl seated opposite began to titter audibly.

The other passengers were content with furtive smiles.

After the lapse of a few minutes, which seemed as long as eternity, the driver stopped the horses of his own accord. The boy jumped out of the 'bus. The conviction was upon him already that he would not be at Trafalgar Square by twelve o'clock. He looked wildly about the dense throng in which he found himself. Where was he? He had lost his bearings completely. If he were not at 24 Trafalgar Square by twelve o'clock his hopes would be shattered for ever. The thought of the little room rendered him desperate. Yet what could he do? He looked up at a clock over a jeweler's shop. It was already twenty-five minutes past eleven. Only thirty-five minutes more and it would be all over. All his assurance was gone; and he did not know where he was. Yet before he started he had planned everything perfectly. He had looked out the way from Milton Street on a map of the great city; he had committed every street and turning of the route to memory.

However, the street in which he stood was not unfamiliar. Yes, he had been in it several times with his father. It was called — it was called the Strand. Yet he did not know what was its proximity to Trafalgar Square. He had now no knowledge of where it lay, now that by entering the omnibus he had wantonly forfeited all the sense of locality he had acquired. Yet he knew that Square so well. It was

there that he had spent so many delectable hours lately in a noble building, gazing at the wonderful pictures of the ancient painters. He looked up at a street corner, and saw the name Craven Street, and then he looked again at the remorseless hands of the clock. How was it possible to get from Craven Street to Trafalgar Square in half-an-hour? What could he do? The road was a maze of obscurity. The program had passed entirely out of his mind.

All at once, however, he was touched by inspiration. He knew all about cabs! And they were recalled to his mind by the sight of a number of these vehicles standing a few yards away in a row behind some railings. They were in a place where the traffic made a veritable whirlpool; and he remembered that he had noted that place before, and that his father had told him it was the entrance to Charing Cross railway station.

Yes, he knew all about cabs; his father with marvelous foresight had instructed him in that branch of education. And he had said to him, "Whenever you lose your way in the great city, be sure that you ask one of those cab-driver street-persons to take you to your destination." There and then the boy felt in his pockets, because he knew that this hazardous but necessary undertaking could only be accomplished by the aid of pieces of silver.

Before he had set out on his great adventure, his father had given him ten pieces of silver. These he now produced and counted carefully. Then hav-

ing assured himself that he was furnished with the necessary means, he set out to reach the row of cabs. With a supreme effort of the will he dismissed from his thoughts all the frightful risks that he incurred, and plunged recklessly into the mighty stream that had to be navigated ere he could reach the row of cabs. But dire necessity armed him with strange valor.

As he emerged from the whirlpool breathless, but still alive, into the presence of the row of cabs, he accosted with heart violently beating the foremost of the cab-driver street-persons, who stood at the door of his vehicle eating his mid-day meal out of a piece of newspaper.

"I-if y-you p-please, I w-will g-give you these t-ten p-pieces of s-silver — sh-shillings, you know," he said, sick with anxiety, "if you will take me in your c-cab to No. 24 Trafalgar Square by t-twelve o'clock."

With eyes of entreaty the boy held out his hand to the cab-driver street-person, and lying on its open palm were the ten pieces of silver.

The cab-driver street-person's first act was to look very solemnly at the pieces of silver, and then at the boy with equal solemnity. Then with a solemnity which seemed to transcend either of these actions, he transferred each of the pieces of silver without undignified haste, nor yet with churlish reluctance, to his own somewhat grimy palm.

"C-can y-you do it?" said the boy hoarsely, "or are the minutes too few; is the time too little?"

By this, as if attracted by the mien of the cab-driver street-person, several of his companions had come about him.

"Can I do it, Captain," said the cab-driver street-person slowly and more solemnly than ever as he looked at his companions, and balanced a large piece of cheese very thoughtfully on the end of a clasp-knife. "We'll make no promises, Captain, but we'll try."

"Oh y-yes, p-please," said the boy, "d-do t-try."

"The old hoss don't purtend to be a flyer, you know, Captain," said the cab-driver street-person, as he wrapped up the remainder of his meal in the newspaper in a fashion so leisurely that the boy could hardly endure it; "at least not these days, although in his prime he ran second in the Cesarewitch, but there's no saying what he can do when he tries."

The cab-driver street-person climbed to his perch as the boy was assisted into the interior of the vehicle by two other cab-driver street-persons who ensconced him therein, and closed the door upon him as though he were a pearl of price. They then stood to await the fruit of their labors with an air of expectancy that was quite politely dissembled.

"I suppose, Joe," said one of the driver's confreres, with a solemnity that was in nowise inferior to that of the man on the box, "you'll go by the

Suez Canal and Himalayer Mountains route, what?"

"Yuss," said the driver as the hansom moved off slowly, "if the old hoss will stand to the scenery. If he ain't taking any it will have to be *viâ* Mentone and the Lake o' Geneva."

To the boy's dismay, the hansom seemed hardly to move beyond a crawl. It went along several narrow by-streets off the Strand which he had never seen before. As he sat in the hansom a faint recollection returned to him that Trafalgar Square must be "over there." But the cab-driver street-person seemed to be taking him in the opposite direction.

They passed a clock. It was a quarter to twelve. Why didn't the horse go faster? Then he remembered with a pang that the cab-driver street-person had said it was old. How injudicious he had been to choose an old horse! He should have chosen a young horse when speed was of such paramount importance. But what was the difference between a young horse and an old horse? Had his life depended on the answer, he could not have told. What a lot of obscure knowledge there was to acquire in the practical sciences. Every step he took alone among the streets of the great city some new problem confronted him — problems which no mind could foreshadow unless it experienced them first. Less than an hour ago, when he left the little room, after striving all through the long night to foresee every contingency that was likely to arise, after drawing up the "program" with such minute care, it had not entered his head that

he would have to ride in a cab, and be called upon to discriminate between an old horse and a young one.

The poor old animal seemed scarcely to push one leg before the other. If only he knew the way, and he knew how to get out of the cab, he would be able to run much faster. Yet the cab and himself and the driver must be cruel burdens for the poor old horse. He felt a pitiless street-person to be sitting there, preoccupied with his own affairs, while he inflicted sufferings upon a dumb animal. But he must, he must, he must be at No. 24 Trafalgar Square as the clocks gave the hour of twelve!

What was that? The chimes of a clock. One, two, three, four; four quarters of the hour! His heart sank. It was all over. The first stroke of the hour of twelve was striking. His pilgrimage had been made in vain. He had one more failure to record. He would never, his sinking heart informed him, be able to retain the little room.

Then he found that the hansom had stopped altogether. The solemn face of the cab-driver street-person peered at him through a hole in the roof.

"Here y'are, Captain," he said, with a pride that was finely restrained, "number twenty-four. The old 'oss 'as done it on 'is 'ead."

The boy was out of the vehicle at a bound. He cried to the cabman, "Oh, t-thank you, oh, t-thank you!"

The fifth stroke of twelve had struck. No. 24 was displayed on a door six yards away. Beside it was

a brass plate inscribed. *Messrs. Crumpett and Hawker, Publishers.*

In a state of excitement that he found it impossible to allay, the boy entered through the swing doors. Almost immediately he found his progress barred by a counter. Behind it a miscellaneous collection of street-persons, whose sex was unmistakably that of the male, was writing in books, clicking typewriters, ringing telephones, tying up parcels.

The boy, knowing he had come to stand on the threshold of nameless mysteries, awoke to the discovery that he was entirely divested of the powers of speech and motion. Yet as he stood in bewilderment, not knowing what to do now that after such infinite vicissitudes he had come to No. 24 Trafalgar Square at the appointed hour, the occupant of a tall stool behind a glass partition in the left-hand corner of the counting-house left that eminence, and at a leisure that was really remarkable sauntered up to the counter to the applicant.

The individual who had left the high stool was declared, when he came to stand before the boy, to be no unworthy specimen of his time and country. In age he might have been twelve or he might have been forty; yet upon every feature of a small and wizened countenance, which embodied all the most salient characteristics of the fox and the ferret, was stamped a not inconsiderable intellectual quality. On the score of physique this personage was not so well equipped. He was undersized to the point of the

stunted; but Nature, with her liberal cunning, had granted him ample compensation for his lack of inches. He had an air. His air had the inimitable aplomb which is the perquisite of the few.

At first the boy could do nothing but stare in dire confusion at this somewhat sinister figure. He was dumb, yet his lips were wide apart, and he was trembling all over. The whole of the ritual that had undergone such a careful preparation, in which every possible contingency that could arise had been foreseen and counteracted, had vanished from his mind as completely as though it had never been in it.

"The tailor's is next door," said the wizened boy, after a period of thoughtful contemplation of him who stood at the other side of the counter. As he spoke he appeared to pick his words with the cool delicacy of a connoisseur.

Another period of silence followed this piece of information, which was broken at last by an ineffectual stammer from the applicant.

"I — I — I d-don't w-want the t-tailors, s-sir," he said.

"Really," said the other with a courtesy which, although quite amiable, was in nowise expansive, "I thought perhaps you might."

"Oh n-n-no," said the boy. "I — I — I ——"

"Perhaps you are not aware," said the other with a bland, impersonal pleasantness, "that this is the counting-house of Crumpett and Hawker?"

The mention of the magic name Crumpett and

Hawker had a remarkable effect. Almost as if at the beck of the wand of a sorcerer it restored to the mind of the applicant the program which he had forgotten so completely. From the inmost recesses of a breast-pocket, whence it had been carefully stowed away, he produced the letter he had received from that eminent firm of publishers. This he handed across the counter to the under-sized and wizened boy, and accompanied the act by a low bow that seemed unmistakably to create a favorable impression.

"M-Messers. C-Crumpett and H-Hawker," he said, "P-P-P-Publishers, No. 24 Trafalgar Square, have b-bestowed the honor of this c-command upon me. I — I — I p-present m-myself in obedience to it."

The undersized and wizened boy having successfully dissembled his astonishment at this unconventional mode of address, read the contents of the letter with a lively curiosity, which he dissembled just as successfully.

"William Jordan, Junior?" he asked.

"Yes-Yes, sir," said the boy.

The undersized and wizened boy began to whistle to himself softly.

"Perhaps you'll come this way," he said with a reticence of which he had every reason to be proud.

He lifted up a movable piece of the counter, and indicated to the applicant that he might pass through. This the boy did almost involuntarily. At first, finding himself immersed into so much publicity, with so many pairs of eyes and strange faces all about him,

he feared that his self-command would go. Yet all this had been foreseen in that program that had been devised with such care. "Courage, Achilles!" he muttered, yet so that none could hear him. And although he felt that the back of his head was being penetrated by the ruthless curiosity through which he passed, he followed the undersized and wizened boy across the counting-house, looking neither to the right nor to the left.

His mentor opened the door in a glass partition and bade him go within.

"The Chief will send for you presently," he said with courteous austerity. "Take a chair."

Several street-persons, inclining to young manhood, were in the room. One and all were sitting exceedingly upright on leather-covered chairs. Apparently these youthful street-persons were stouter and taller and stronger than himself. They also had that indefinable quality in their faces that suggested that their outlook on men and things was more mature. A complete silence was maintained by all; indeed, their attitude seemed designed to suggest that other than themselves, no other individual was present in the room.

At first the boy stood nervously in the centre of the room with his hat in his hand. The other occupants contemplated him with leisurely and impersonal aloofness. Presently it was borne in upon the boy that it would call for more courage to stand than to sit, so he sat. He took a chair, and poised himself

upon its extreme verge, striving vainly to control the beatings of his heart. It seemed as though they must choke him.

In a little while the undersized and wizened boy entered with the dignity of one who is accustomed to accept responsibility in great issues.

"The Chief will see John Wilkins," he said.

John Wilkins, a muscular specimen of British youth, six feet high, rose and followed the emissary from high places with an air of slightly bored indifference.

The boy pressed both hands over his beating heart.

The emissary from high places entered again. He carried a newspaper that had pictures.

"Care to look at *Punch*?" he said. He handed the newspaper that had pictures to the boy with an air of carefully defined abstraction which suggested that he viewed this amenity in the light of a duty.

"Oh, t-thank you, t-thank you," said the boy.

"What's the screw?" said the handsome, fair-haired fellow to the emissary from high places.

"The *salary* is ten shillings a week." The emissary laid a delicate emphasis on the second word.

"Oh, is it?" said the fair-haired fellow. "What's the hours?"

"Eight till seven," said the wizened boy.

"Half-day Saturday?"

"On Saturday Messrs. Crumpett and Hawker close at six."

"Oh do they! What 'oliday?"

"During the first year there is no *holiday*," said the wizened boy, speaking very slowly and distinctly, and laying a delicate emphasis on the last word. "After the first year the holiday, as a rule, is permanent."

The wizened boy retired from the room with a calmness that could be felt.

"Uppish, ain't he?" said the fair-haired fellow, speaking to nobody in particular.

The boy turned over the pages of the newspaper. This was of a type he had never seen before. The pictures bewildered him. He turned them upside down to see if he could understand them better. He then concluded that his own mental and moral disorganization had become embodied, and the newspaper fluttered from his hands. The beating of his heart was choking him.

The emissary from high places entered again.

"The Chief will see Calverley Brown."

The fair-haired fellow stood up and followed the emissary with a precise imitation of the gait and manner of his predecessor.

The emissary entered again and picked up the newspaper from the carpet. His chin was poised at a supercilious angle.

"When one has no use for *Punch*," he said with a slowness that made each word valuable, "it is considered the thing to place it on the table, or to offer it to one's friends."

The boy's pale cheeks grew vivid, for the almost

exaggerated development of his courtesy enabled him to appreciate that this reproof was merited.

"I — I — I b-beg your p-pardon, sir," he stammered painfully; "I — I — I ——"

The wizened boy sauntered out without paying the slightest heed to these apologies. However, the next moment he had sauntered in again.

"The Chief will see Cholmondeley Montgomery Mo-ly——"

"Mullynooks," said a small, black-haired, black-eyed young man, rising with a yawn.

"Mo-ly-know," said the emissary, articulating the name with great aplomb in his own manner.

"Neux rhymes with dukes," said the young man with black eyes with an air of condescension. "And you got my first names wrong, but it is of no consequence."

"I agree with you," said the emissary with a devastating emphasis, "it *is* of no consequence. And it is not considered the thing to keep fancy names without one is up to them socially."

Cholmondeley Montgomery Molyneux retired with an air of supreme indifference, and of such inimitable *flair*, that those of his predecessors were made to appear as but the poorest of imitations.

There was now only one other person remaining in the room, one whose youthfulness had been merged some years in a robust and full-blooded manhood.

"Cocky young swine, ain't he?" said this paladin to the boy with a great and sudden friendliness. "I

should have to put it across him if I had to do with him much."

"I — I — I b-beg your p-pardon, sir," stammered the boy. Under his breath, he repeated several words of the English tongue which he then heard for the first time.

"Stow the polite, matey," said the other with an increasing friendliness. "A cove can't live up to it when he's off duty."

"Stow the polite, matey," the boy muttered under his breath. What a baffling tongue was this with which he had to grapple!

The emissary from high places entered again.

"The Chief will see William Ewart Gladstone Smith," he said. "And he desires that each applicant will have his references ready."

The boy was now left alone. He found it impossible to control his excitement. He rose from his chair, now that no one else was present, and walked up and down the carpeted floor like a wild animal in a cage. What was meant by "references?" This was yet another new development; it had not been included in the program. How much he had yet to learn in the practical sciences before he could hope to move about the great world out of doors in freedom and security! Even a man like William Ewart Gladstone Smith, who looked just an ordinary common street-person, made use of a vocabulary that was quite beyond his experience.

The wizened and undersized boy entered again.

"The Chief will see William Jordan, Junior," he said.

Not knowing where he was, nor what he was doing, the boy turned to follow the emissary from high places. He was led through another door out into an ill-lit passage.

"Come in here a minute," said the emissary.

He led the way into a small, dark room. Producing a clothes-brush, he began to wield it upon the applicant scrupulously.

"There's a hair-brush," he said, "if you'd like to brush your hair."

The applicant thanked him inarticulately. As if he were in a dream he began to manipulate the hair-brush. All this was not in the program.

"The Chief," said the wizened boy impressively, "is Octavius Crumpett, M.A., D.C.L. (Oxon.). Be careful of your aitches. Articulate your words correctly. If your references are all right you stand an outsider's chance. The others were a scratch lot."

Having uttered these cabalistic remarks, the emissary led the way up a steep flight of stairs. The applicant followed dizzily. His eyes were growing dark. He could scarcely see. "Courage, Achilles," he muttered faintly as he came to the landing at the top.

The emissary gave a smart, resounding knock upon a closed door. He then opened it briskly and noiselessly, and in a similar fashion stepped withn. "William Jordan, Junior," he said in his clear voice, and

with his great aplomb of manner. At the same moment he gave the boy a little push into the room and closed the door upon him.

The boy stood upon the threshold. He could see nothing. There was a curious singing in his ears. All about him was quite dark.

"Good-morning," said a deep, slow, pleasant voice. It boomed like a bell.

The boy did not speak, but bowed very low, yet he was not in the least conscious that he did so. This act, however, restored to him the sense of vision. He could see; although an intolerable noise of singing was still in his ears.

A somewhat ponderous, double-chinned, exceedingly handsome and prosperous gentleman was standing with the back of his ample form to the fire. The skirts of his frock-coat were outspread, and two white and rotund hands held them apart. He was dressed with a care that was almost religious. His hair was groomed immaculately; his short side-whiskers had been treated by the hand of a master. He wore a glass in the right eye. Everything about him, even the pearl which gave distinction and rigidity to his necktie, was a testimonial to his status. And upon the countenance of this gentleman was a simper of such an urbane expansiveness, that its function apparently was to be antiseptic to a dignity which, without this precaution, must have proved too much for human nature's daily food.

"You wrote a nice letter," said Mr. Octavius

Crumpett, "a very nice letter. Did you write it without aid?"

"Y-y-yes, s-sir," said the boy. He felt a thrill of joy to know that the power of speech had returned.

"A most creditable letter," said Mr. Octavius Crumpett with the benign purr of an unusually well-nurtured feline. "A little unconventional, perhaps — but no matter. May I ask where you were educated?"

"I — I — I d-don't t-think I k-now, sir," the boy stammered. This question was not in the program.

"Curious," said Mr. Octavius Crumpett, purring more benignly than ever — "Curious not to know where one was educated. Yet, perhaps it is immaterial. One board school must be very like another. What is your age?"

The boy's heart gave a leap. This question was unmistakably in the program.

"E-eighteen y-years and f-fifteen days, sir," he said.

"How odd," said Mr. Octavius Crumpett, whose delightful simper expanded to the region of the smile. "What a curious computation. One had no idea that the Board School was so precise in these matters. I must mention this to my friend Arnold. By the way, I showed my friend Arnold your nice letter. He did not consider it typical of the Board School. He said the style had a flavor of latinity.

Do they provide for instruction in Latin in the Board School curriculum?"

"I — I — I d-don't t-think I know, sir," said the boy. The question was not in the program.

"Then perhaps we might assume that they don't," said Mr. Octavius Crumpett. "Perhaps the pleasing flavor of latinity in your epistolary style is due to one of those mysterious side currents of descent which continually perplex the best biographers."

Mr. Octavius Crumpett's manner of saying this seemed to be designed to suggest that if his natural power of mind had betrayed him into saying anything unusual, he hoped it would be understood that the solecism of which he was guilty was not due to ignorance of the foremost practice, but was rather the fruit of uncontrollable natural forces.

"You do not look very robust," he said, looking at the frail figure steadily through the glass that rendered his right eye so formidable. "Are you used to hard work?"

"I have determined, sir, to inure my frame to the hardest labor," said the boy. This question was in the program.

"The English they impart at the Board School," said Mr. Octavius Crumpett, "is sound and wholesome, if a trifle bookish. I think some of our public schools might copy their methods with advantage. I must speak to Arnold. I wish your chest was a bit broader, my boy," he said kindly, "and that your

cheeks were not so pale, and your eyes were not so sunken, because in other respects you do not seem to be unworthy of the traditions of this house. Do you mind showing me your finger-nails?'

This request was not in the program, but by now the boy had obtained sufficient self-command to enable him to pluck off his gloves nervously. Of late he had been compelled to wear gloves constantly because he could never keep his hands warm.

In the detached but efficient manner of one accustomed to immolate his private feelings upon the altar of duty, Mr. Octavius Crumpett scrutinized each of the cold and fragile hands, through which shone the delicate veins.

"They are nicely kept," he said; "they are kept very nicely indeed. I may say that the other applicants, notwithstanding the character of their testimonials, had not a scrupulous regard for personal decency. It would give me great pleasure personally to see you in the counting-house of Crumpett and Hawker"— there was an accession of pride to the mellifluous accents of Mr. Octavius Crumpett —"for you strike one as an exceedingly *gentleman-like* and *well-conditioned* boy, but in a physical sense nature does not seem to have been so much your friend. However, Mr. Jordan, perhaps you will be good enough to touch that bell."

From his station before the fire Mr. Octavius Crumpett indicated a bell on his table; and although Mr. Jordan had never touched a bell before in his

life, he was able to understand what was required of him, for now all his faculties seemed to be strung up to a point of almost perilous receptivity; and, further, he was able to reel across the carpet, and, by a miraculous intervention on the part of providence, was able to make the bell give forth an audible sound.

The visible and actual proof of that which he had accomplished was furnished by the entrance of the undersized and wizened boy.

"Mr. Dodson," said Mr. Octavius Crumpett, "I shall be obliged if you will ask Mr. Walkinshaw to have the kindness to come up-stairs."

Mr. Dodson withdrew with the air of an ambassador.

The boy's gaze was one of intense entreaty as he looked through the sacred mists which veiled the Olympian form of Mr. Octavius Crumpett. That emblem of a monumental culture still stood with the skirts of his coat outspread before the fire. Its genial warmth seemed still to make him purr and simper in every crease and fold of his chaste portliness. At every breath he drew he seemed to approximate more nearly to an extraordinary fine and handsome feline, which finds itself in unusually luxurious surroundings.

His meditations, which must have been those of an optimist, were curtailed by the entrance of a thin, formal, intellectual, yet slightly melancholy gentleman, whose refined and sensitve features were yet stamped with the simper of a large content. Perhaps this

cachet of those who take a large view of things had not always been upon that refined countenance, but many years' association with a foremost practitioner of the amenities of life had had an indelible effect. Habit had become nature. Mr. Walter Pater Walkinshaw might once have had his modest doubts as became any other private gentleman; but he was as fundamentally sound as the great house of Crumpett and Hawker itself. Of the simper there could be no doubt; for in mien, in manner, in deportment he was designed to suggest that, like the wizened boy himself, he had been modelled carefully upon a superb original which at this moment was standing with its coat-tails held away from the fire.

"Mr. Walkinshaw," said Mr. Octavius Crumpett, "I have interviewed the applicants; and, after giving every consideration to each candidate among those of whom we decided to limit our choice, I have come to the conclusion that Mr. William Jordan, Junior, is most fitted to enter the counting-house of Crumpett and Hawker. Unfortunately he is not very robust. Have you any views, Mr. Walkinshaw?"

Presumably in these high altitudes these very dangerous implements were permitted to the English gentleman. Or, perhaps, it was that with his fine instinct, Mr. Octavius Crumpett had divined that in any case the views of Mr. Walkinshaw would be orthodox. For after that gentleman had proceeded very earnestly to scrutinize the shrinking countenance of Mr.

William Jordan, Junior, his views concurred with those that had been already expressed by the head of the firm.

"No, sir," said Mr. Walkinshaw; "not very robust."

"May I ask, Mr. Walkinshaw," said Mr. Octavius Crumpett, "are the duties of an arduous nature which are incident to the career of a handy youth? I am afraid I have no first-hand knowledge."

The simper of Mr. Octavius Crumpett was of a most winning character.

"No, sir, I dare say not," said Mr. Walkinshaw, taking the extreme course of permitting himself to lapse sufficiently from the deportment of his model as to indulge in a hearty laugh. But the circumstances seemed to demand it. "I think I am correct, sir," continued Mr. Walkinshaw, "in saying that the duties usually incident to the career of a handy youth are not in any sense of the word light ones. But in the counting-house of Crumpett and Hawker they may admit of mitigation."

"Could you tell me, Mr. Walkinshaw, what would be asked of one who sustained that character in the counting-house of Crumpett and Hawker?" said the head of that great house with a sweetness that was a happy mingling of the cherub and the seraph.

"His chief duty would consist, sir, in pasting labels on rejected manuscripts," said Mr. Walkinshaw; "and he would be called upon to fill in his time

by addressing envelopes, carrying ledgers, copying letters, keeping the counting-house tidy, and in trying to be of general service."

"Do you feel that you could sustain these responsibilities?" said Mr. Octavius Crumpett to the applicant.

"I will not fail, sir," said the boy.

The manner in which he expressed this determination seemed favorably to impress both gentlemen.

"I think, Mr. Walkinshaw," said Mr. Octavius Crumpett, in a voice that was charged with emotion, "in the circumstances we shall be almost justified in introducing Mr. Willam Jordan, Junior, into the counting-house of Crumpett and Hawker."

"I concur, sir," said Mr. Walkinshaw, in a voice whose own emotion was attuned with supreme good breeding to that of his chief. "I concur."

"I hope, Mr. Jordan," said Mr. Octavius Crumpett, whose beautiful and vibrant tones had acquired a paternal inflection, "that you will contrive to maintain the excellent impression you have already created. For let me assure you, Mr. Jordan, it is easier for the average youth to become an Extension Lecturer than it is for him to occupy a stool in the counting-house of Crumpett and Hawker. Good-morning, Mr. Jordan."

Mr. Octavius Crumpett concluded by thrusting out his right hand so suddenly and so unexpectedly, that the boy shrank away from him as though he were expecting to receive a blow.

"Shake it," whispered Mr. Walkinshaw in his ear.

The boy grasped the firm white hand with a timidity that would not have been out of place had it been the fore-paw of a polar bear. However, his trepidation seemed further to prepossess him in the favor of both gentlemen. It was not always that those of his callow years had this nice but lively discrimination of the fine shades of the social cosmogony into which unsmiling Fate had projected them.

Mr. Walter Pater Walkinshaw conducted in person down the steep stairs the latest addition to the clerical staff of Messrs. Crumpett and Hawker. He led him into the counting-house, into the midst of that concourse of fellow laborers in what was now to be his vineyard through which he had already passed.

As Mr. Walter Pater Walkinshaw did this he said, with an impressiveness of which the occasion seemed to be worthy, "Above all, Mr. Jordan, it behoves you to remember that the humblest occupant of a stool in the counting-house of Messrs. Crumpett and Hawker is *ab ovo* a candidate for election to the Athenæum Club under the rule *honoris causâ*."

Unfortunately, Mr. Jordan's limited acquaintance with the practical sciences did not permit him to realize the golden vista which thus early in life had come to unfold itself before him.

With this exhortation Mr. Walter Pater Walkin-

shaw relinquished his charge into the safe keeping of the undersized and wizened boy.

"Mr. Dodson," said Mr. Walkinshaw, "be good enough to assume responsibility for Mr. William Jordan, Junior. Be good enough to inspire him, as far as in you lies, with the particular tone that tradition exacts from all who are associated, even in the humblest capacity, with this eminent and old-established publishing house. His main duty, Mr. Dodson, will, as you know, consist in tying up, sealing, and labelling rejected manuscripts. See to it that he observes particular care in using black wax in all cases of rejection. In the less frequent, the much less frequent instances of acceptance, he will, of course, observe the rule of using red sealing wax. That is, of course, for fiction only. For biography and travel he will, of course, use yellow, and I need not remind you that for poetry and *belles lettres* he will invariably use purple."

"Oh yes, sir," said the wizened boy, with an air of great intelligence, "Mr. Jordan shall be initiated into everything."

XV

It was in this fashion that the boy entered upon a new and curious phase of his existence. In the hours that intervened between the moment of his entrance into that strange place and seven o'clock that evening, when he was at liberty to return to the great world out of doors, and thereby to his father in the little room, he walked on air and moved in a dream.

Even when he had resigned his hat and overcoat and gloves, and had been shown where to place them; even when he had climbed a high stool in the mercifully secluded left-hand corner of that dreadfully public place at the side of the wizened boy, whose name was Mr. James Dodson, who henceforward was to be his mentor in many things, even then he could not realize what had happened to him. He could not realize that his prayers had been answered; that in sober truth he had become a conqueror.

For the remainder of that strange, terrible, yet entrancing day he was not an apt pupil, but he did his best. His thoughts were merged in a devout sense of wonder at finding himself there. Many and surprising were his vagaries on this first day in those interminable hours which kept him from the little

room. They filled his mentor with pain, incredulity, and protest.

"We do find 'em, we do!" Mr. Dodson communicated in his second or unofficial manner to one of his fellow laborers in the vineyard before the end of the day. "That d——d fool, Octavius, must be up the pole. This kid has got about as much savvy as a bottle-nosed hornet."

When at last came the hour of his release the boy returned in a state of great exaltation to his father in the little room. A week ago it had seemed impossible that he would even be able to obtain pieces of silver by the work of his hands, but now that miracle was come to pass.

However, the glamor of achievement passed all too soon. Disillusionment began on the morning of the following day. It was then that the full measure of nervous bewilderment at all the strange things about him descended upon him; it was then that the sense of his natural impotence was communicated to him first.

It called for all his fortitude to sustain that long term between eight o'clock in the morning and seven o'clock at night. The minutes passed so tardily that it seemed they would never admit of his release. Long before the end of the day it was as much as he could do to refrain from running away from it all in the horror of sheer nausea. He longed to flee anywhere — anywhere so long as he could escape

from this strange servitude to which he had committed himself.

The clerks staring at him from their tall stools; his curious surroundings; their publicity; the curt and uncompromising manner in which he was addressed; and above all the many and remarkable duties he was called upon to perform — duties which somehow did not seem to coincide with the peculiar form of "handiness" upon which he had been wont to plume himself — all these circumstances made calls upon his courage as he scarcely knew how to meet. Yet not once during the day did he allow to escape his thoughts the paramount necessity of proving himself worthy of his good fortune. The need of obtaining pieces of silver had grown to be as great as that of drawing the breath of life.

Only too soon was it apparent to those trained minds in whose midst he was now placed that he was woefully deficient in natural ability. But his intense anxiety to do all that was required of him; his innate courtesy, which was curiously disarming to old and young alike, although sometimes it did not save him from sharp words, and even from tricks and hardships being put upon him; his almost ridiculous docility; his increasing endeavors to be of service to others, misguided though they were; his unprecedented blindness to his own personal interests; and above all his painfully, ridiculous obvious mental deficiencies, which by general consensus "he could

not help," saved him from being complained of openly to the highest quarters as "hopelessly incompetent," which all about him during the early days of his servitude considered him to be.

"He is about as capable of sitting a stool in the counting-house of Crumpett and Hawker," said Mr. Walter Pater Walkinshaw, that august gentleman to whose charge he had been committed in the first instance by the head of the firm, and who occupied a low chair at a small table in the middle of the room, and who also exuded "the traditions of the firm" at every pore, "as he is of editing an edition of Thackeray. I shall be compelled to make a complaint if he does not bring a little common intelligence to bear on the most elementary duties. Here he has actually sealed the Lady Rowena Montmorency's prose poem — accepted prose poem — in yellow, in spite of the fact that prose poems stand in a class by themselves and must be sealed in pink; and further he has omitted to stamp the parcel with the monogram of the firm, although it expressly lays down on page four of the printed rules of procedure, that the MSS. of the daughters of peers must in all cases be so treated. Mr. Dodson, please have the goodness to inform him that if this occurs again I shall be compelled to bring it to the notice of Mr. Octavius. And if such a thing should come to the ear of Mr. Octavius I cannot answer for the consequences."

"I will, sir," said Mr. Dodson respectfully.

Thereupon Mr. Dodson returned to the high stool in the left-hand corner, which had been allotted to Mr. William Jordan, Junior. He was engaged in trying to wrap up a novel of portentous length, which had received a somewhat uncompromising quietus at the hands of Messrs. Crumpett and Hawker. Mr. Dodson watched his *protégé* somewhat grimly as he wrestled not very effectually with the leaves of this production and endeavored to encase them in a brown paper and string.

"Look here, lunatic, you want it tighter," said Mr. Dodson, having rendered him who sought to tie the parcel excessively unhappy by his presence. "Slew it round a bit, and turn over the corners like I showed you yesterday. Pa's been talking about you. He says if you don't do better you will get the boot."

"I — I b-beg your p-pardon, sir," stammered the boy.

"Don't be so d——d polite, you lunatic!"

The boy had already made the surprising discovery that his mentor possessed two manners, *i. e.* that of public life which approximated to the dignity of the house of Messrs. Crumpett and Hawker; and also that of private intercourse, which was apt to be so idiomatic as sometimes not to be intelligible. "If you'd use a little less butter," said Mr. Dodson, "and show a little more brightness at your work, you and I would get on better. You know what I told you

about the Lady Rowena Thingumbob's accepted prose poem? — well I might never have said anything for all the notice you take. I can't be always at your elbow. To-morrow you had better bring your nurse."

XVI

The boy had now been a week in the service of Messrs. Crumpett and Hawker. And although every minute of the weary hours he passed daily at the dread place, No. 24, Trafalgar Square, had grown already to be one long and unceasing tribulation; although he could not sleep at night for thinking of what the remorseless morrow had in store; although he was nearly debarred altogether from his lifelong intercourse with the ancient authors; although he was so weary with labor and humiliation by the hour of seven that he could scarcely drag his limbs along the streets, he was yet sustained continually by the thought that he was gaining pieces of silver to maintain that sanctuary which awaited him, in the midst of millions upon millions of street-persons, for the purpose of affording a solace for his distress.

When the first week's wages were put into his hand, three dull florins and four worn shillings, the quick tears sprang into his eyes. He placed the coins in his pocket with trembling fingers. There and then he longed to run out into the streets of the great city to shout his joy. Such an achievement as this was too wonderful to realize; the dreams of his wildest avarice had been exceeded. How those pieces of silver burnt in his pocket throughout the

interminable hours of the afternoon! How he longed for the hour of seven to strike that he might run back to the little room and lay them before his father!

He was still more severely censured that afternoon by Mr. Dodson. He even suffered the ignominy of being summoned to the table by Mr. Walter Pater Walkinshaw, and of being admonished publicly for his incompetence. He was spoken to so sternly, and he felt the position in which he stood to be one of such humiliation, that in spite of the frantic efforts he put forth to conquer his weakness in the presence of others, the tears came again into his eyes.

"I — I will do better, sir," he said, in such a tone of distress that it seemed to soften the smiles of those who heard the words. "I — I will do better. I am praying continually that I may do better."

"What can one do with a fellow like that?" said Mr. Walkinshaw subsequently, in an eloquent aside to his second in command, Mr. Aristophanes Luff. "I suppose he suffers from a form of religious mania; at least a child could see that he is mentally weak. I am sure he ought to be complained of; he is not anything like up to our traditions; how Mr. Octavius could have fallen into such an error heaven only knows; but really I haven't the heart to say so."

"There can be no doubt he is a little deficient mentally," observed Mr. Aristophanes Luff, "but perhaps we might give him another week."

Seven o'clock struck at last, and the clerks dis-

carded their pens and went home. The boy was always the last to go forth, not because he had been told to remain; it was simply that his curiously innate sense of the fitness of things, which was out of all harmony with his development in the practical sciences, declared that he must never seek to take precedence of his elders. To-night a fire was kindled in his veins. It seemed as though the others would never close their desks and go. He could hardly curb his desire to rush out before them all. But at last they had all left the counting-house, and he was at liberty to carry the treasure to his father in the little room.

Like one possessed he ran home with the pieces of silver making wild music in his pocket. He seemed almost delirious with joy as he threaded his way through the press with a heedlessness which seemed almost contemptuous. It was truly astonishing with what ease and lightness he had already come to move about the great world out of doors. To-night he did not fear the crossings in the least. He felt no desire to shrink from the ever-pressing crowd of street-persons who formerly had elbowed him into the gutter. To-night he could bear his part with all who walked abroad in that vast city.

When he reached the little room his father was still occupied in the shop. With a remarkable suppression of his all-mastering desire, he determined to wait until eight o'clock until the shop was closed for the night before he laid out his treasure before his

father. It must be a solemn ceremonial. There must be no disturbing influence; his father must be his alone when he confided to his keeping the first pieces of silver he had won by the sweat of his brow and the travail of his spirit.

Just as it had seemed that seven o'clock would never come, it now seemed that eight o'clock would never come either. The pieces of silver appeared to be playing strange tricks in his pocket. But with a concentration of the will, which he felt to be stupendous, he set about preparing the frugal supper for them both. If the repression of his feeling of triumph were to kill him he must not let it gain expression until his father had closed the shop.

Perversely enough his father, all unconscious, did not come into the little room until a quarter-past eight. They sat down together at their evening meal. The man looked with a curious wistfulness into the face of the boy. The eyes were almost weird in their brightness; the pale cheeks were strangely flushed. He rose and took from the hearth a pot of warm broth, which he placed before the boy. Involuntarily the boy drew away from it with a little gesture of repugnance.

His father besought him to eat the broth.

"Oh no, no, my father," said the boy, with a shudder, "there is flesh in it!"

By a supreme effort of the will the boy swallowed his milk and ate his bread, and cleared the table, and

trimmed the hearth before he disclosed his pieces of silver. He even contrived to clothe his unseemly and vainglorious eagerness with a kind of humility as he laid each piece side by side upon the table-cloth.

"Behold, my father!" he said in a choking whisper, "I have won my first pieces of silver!"

His father enfolded him in tender arms. The slight frame was quivering like that of an imprisoned bird.

"Kiss me, my father," he said, with that simplicity which his father could only obey.

The man pressed a caress upon the gaunt cheek.

"Let us kneel, my father, together before these pieces of silver," said the boy.

They knelt together.

"Thou dost not rejoice as do I, O my father!" said the boy, searching the eyes of the white-haired man. "These pieces of silver do not seem to bring you gladness. And yet I have shouted my joy. To-night I know the pangs of happiness that Hannibal and Cæsar and Alexander felt. To-night I am fit to woo the priestess of Delphi."

"We lose the Promethean fire as age falls about us," said his father. "We do not dance nor pipe, neither do we sing. But I salute thee, Achilles. Ave, ave, my brave one!"

"I never thought to see this hour," said the boy, gathering up the pieces of silver and placing them in

his father's hand. "I know not what they have cost me, my father, but now I would that the cost were a hundred times more."

"Is it not a pious thought, beloved one," said his father, "that that which we render is given to us again."

"I have wrought greatly in the practical sciences during the week past, my father," said the boy. "My power increases hour by hour; the persons in the streets are nothing like so mysterious to me as they were; and yet still there are great waste places. There is, indeed, much to learn, my father, much to learn."

To-night his mood was one of rare expansion. He spoke unceasingly of what the future bore. The ten pieces of silver acted like a wine of great potency upon the too-delicate strings of the mind.

"Every day, every hour, every minute I am growing in stature," he said. "Every time my heart beats, my father, I am more than I was. To-night I feel a royal courage stirring in my flesh. There is much to learn, my father, much to learn, but one day I feel sure I shall learn it all."

"And when thou hast learnt it all, Achilles?" his father asked.

"Why — why of course, my father, when I have learnt it all I shall commence to be an author," said the boy.

That evening, for the first time in his life, he showed his contempt for the darkness by going up-

stairs to bed without a candle. His father continued to sit at the table in the little room all the night through, consulting one page after another of the aged tome, which was bound so massively, until the chill morning light crept over the top of the shutters. He then walked out bareheaded, slow of gait, into the vapors of the dawn.

XVII

During the week which followed, the behavior of William Jordan, Junior, was very closely scrutinized by his fellow-laborers in the vineyard of No. 24 Trafalgar Square. One and all were freely inoculated with the "traditions of the house." Each member of the counting-house staff, from Mr. Dodson, who might be of any age and standing, to Mr. Walter Pater Walkinshaw, Mr. Aristophanes Luff, Mr. Leslie Stephen Sandars, and Mr. T. B. Macaulay Jenkins, who unmistakably were of one particular period and degree, were infected by a generous jealousy for the name and fame "of the first publishing house in London, and therefore of the civilized world."

"It ain't, you know," Mr. James Dodson communicated to William Jordan, Junior, in his second or unofficial manner, "but Octavius thinks so, and what Octavius thinks the staff has got d—— well to believe."

Mr. William Jordan, Junior, was honored with this confidence while proceeding to a luncheon to be partaken of in Mr. Dodson's company, and by his express invitation, at the refreshment buffet annexed to the Brontë Hotel, which was situated in a by-

street off Trafalgar Square. Mr. Dodson, who needless to say selected this house of refreshment and led the way thereto, ordered of a gorgeous lady in a scarlet blouse and large yellow earrings, whom he addressed as "Chrissie" with that inimitable *flair* that never forsook him on public occasions, "two lean ham-sandwiches and two tankards of half-and-half with plenty of top."

The reception accorded by Mr. William Jordan, Junior, to these viands, for which the buffet of the Brontë Hotel was justly famous, filled Mr. Dodson with astonishment and Chrissie with consternation not unmingled with protest.

"Your fat friend needn't look as though he's tasted vitriol," said the lady in the scarlet blouse, as the boy recoiled with horror at the moment he was saluted by the fumes from the tankard. "That's the best half-and-half in London, young man, and he who says it is not is a perverter of the truth."

"Is — is it h-hemlock?" gasped the boy, as tragically he replaced the tankard upon the marble slab.

With that presence of mind for which he was notorious, Mr. Dodson bent across the counter and whispered something in the ear of the lady in the scarlet blouse, which was not audible to Mr. William Jordan, Junior. To lend color to his statement, in whatever it might consist, Mr. Dodson tapped his forehead in an impersonal and mystical manner.

"Get him a small milk, Chrissie," said Mr. Dodson with a most engaging air, which had long been

the despair and the envy of his wide circle of acquaintance.

When this beverage had been produced and the lady in the scarlet blouse had been thanked profusely, but not altogether mollified by the recipient of this signal act of condescension, both she and Mr. Dodson gazed at him curiously while he looked nervously at the plate containing the ham-sandwich which had been set before him.

"If you'd like a bit of bread-and-butter, you can have it you know," said the lady in the scarlet blouse.

"Oh, t-thank you, t-thank you, if you will have the g-g-great kindness," said the boy. He was relieved beyond expression; yet his embarrassment at being addressed publicly by a mysterious kind of creature of whom his friends, the ancient authors, had invariably formed such remarkable opinions, caused a deep tawny blush to overspread his pale and hollow cheeks.

"You may well look so fat," said the lady in the scarlet blouse, with her indignation melting. She felt that his agitation was a frank testimonial to the impact of her own overpowering personality.

During these transactions, Mr. Dodson, having dispatched his own ham-sandwich and "tankard of half-and-half with plenty of top" with great success, proceeded to deal in like manner with those of his strange companion. And further, at the conclusion of these operations he disclosed, mainly for the information of the lady in the scarlet blouse, the true

basis upon which two such diverse elements as Mr. James Dodson and Mr. William Jordan, Junior, were wont to co-operate.

"Luney," he said to the boy, while he fixed the lady in the scarlet blouse with a steady and unsmiling gaze, "you can lend me two and a kick *pro tem.* Matchbox has gone down in the big race, and he carried my shirt."

"I — I b-beg your p-pardon, sir," stammered the boy. The limit to his knowledge in the practical sciences had presented itself rather abruptly.

"Lend me half-a-dollar, you cuckoo," said Mr. Dodson sternly, "and don't be so darnation polite."

"I — I b-beg your p-pardon, sir," stammered the boy, "I — I d-don't t-think I k-know what you mean."

The lady in the scarlet blouse regarded him with eyes of wonder. Mr. Dodson, however, still retained his self-possession in the presence of an unknowingness that transcended all that had previously come within his purview.

"He comes of a rather good family," said Mr. Dodson in an eloquent aside to the lady in the scarlet blouse.

"Oh, does he," said the lady in the scarlet blouse, opening her lazy eyes a little wider, "a gilt mug."

"What silver have you got about you, Luney?" said Mr. Dodson.

This request was sufficiently intelligible to the boy to cause him to produce a collection of silver pieces

which his father insisted on his carrying about with him. Mr. Dodson selected five shillings in a leisurely and impartial manner.

"I'll make it a dollar," he said, "and mind, my son, that you don't forget to ask me for it. I've got such a weak memory for small things that one of these days I shall forget to attend my own funeral."

Upon this utterance, which the boy was fain to consider as very remarkable, Mr. Dodson disbursed the sum of one shilling and sixpence to the lady in the scarlet blouse, and at the same time took the opportunity of transferring a dahlia, which approximated to the size of a small cauliflower, from his own person to the ample bosom of this already sufficiently gorgeous creature.

"So long, Chrissie," he said. "See you at the Tivoli at a quarter to nine."

With a great air, which the lesser luminaries of his circle were apt to interpret as swagger, Mr. Dodson made for the door.

"Come on, Luney," said he, "let me take you back to your governess."

This speech, delivered in a very audible manner, was not altogether for the guidance of Mr. William Jordan, Junior, but rather for that of two young gentlemen of a similar type to Mr. Dodson himself, who at that moment were entering the buffet.

"'Ow are yer, Jimmy?" said one of these with a nod of easy familiarity.

Mr. Dodson gave a curt nod to embrace them both, and looked them down with a cold, straight glance.

"Cheek," said Mr. Dodson, in a half-audible aside to Mr. William Jordan, Junior. "Infernal cheek!"

"Who's Jimmy touting around with this morning?" said the first of these gentlemen to the lady in the scarlet blouse.

"A gilt mug," said that superb creature coldly from behind her dahlia.

"Thought as much," said the first gentleman with a quizzical look at his companion. "Between you and me and the mustard pot, Chrissie, it's my opinion Jimmy Dodson gets a bigger snob every day."

"Jimmy's all right," said the lady. "If either of *you* had got half *his* style, you'd do."

"Yes, I suppose we should."

Each of the young men gave a sigh that was so imperfectly repressed, that it lent poignant expression to the unattainable.

XVIII

In the process of taking Mr. William Jordan, Junior, back to his governess, Mr. James Dodson, in his capacity of an accomplished man of the world of many years' standing, delivered himself at large upon certain first principles, which he considered to be indispensable to all who sought to graduate in the severe school of worldly experience.

"I'll tell you what it is, my son," he said, taking the bewildered boy by the arm, for an additional tankard of "half-and-half with plenty of top" had provoked in Mr. Dodson an unwonted expansion, "I'll tell you what it is, my son, there is something wrong with you."

The boy did not reply to this indictment. He felt that there was.

"There's something missing," said Mr. Dodson impressively.

The silence of William Jordan, Junior, continued to corroborate Mr. Dodson.

"As I have already said, my son," said Mr. Dodson, "you are just about fivepence halfpenny to the shilling, not more, not a farthing more. I cast no aspersions, mind, upon the maiden aunt who undertook your up-bringing. I don't doubt that she is a good and worthy, and nice-minded old woman, but I

blame her for one thing, my son, for one thing I am forced to blame her."

Who the old woman was that Mr. Dodson was forced to blame and what he blamed her for, William Jordan, Junior, had not the courage to inquire.

"She might at least," Mr. Dodson's tone was one of judicial sadness, "have seen that you had all your buttons on when she turned you out into the world."

"M-my b-buttons, s-sir," stammered William Jordan, Junior, fingering his jacket nervously.

"Yes, my son, your buttons." Mr. Dodson's amiability verged upon the formidable. "When a cove starts out in life now-a-days, he's got to have all his buttons on, and *he's got to have 'em stitched on with wire.* Understand?"

William Jordan, Junior, did not understand at all, but the courage was not his to say so.

"Stitched on with wire," said Mr. Dodson, "but every sucking Cabinet Minister as-sim-i-lates that at his Board School now-a-days. And there are a lot of other little things you have got to have in these days, my son, if you want to see your name in *The Times* when they are handing around the Birthday Honors. And there is one little thing you have not got, which to my mind, is fun-da-ment-ally necessary." Mr. Dodson's voice sank into mystery. "Fun-da-ment-ally necessary. Octavius will tell you the same. You want a manner."

"A — a m-manner, sir?" said the boy.

"Yes, my son, a manner," said Mr. Dodson. "And for heaven's sake drop the sir. I'm not a King or a Commissioner of Police or a Colonel in the volunteers, not yet at any rate. As I say, you want a manner."

"A m-manner!" said the boy anxiously.

"Never heard of a manner, I suppose," said Mr. Dodson in as withering a tone as two tankards of "half-and-half with plenty of top" would permit. "Bright boy! As Pa says, you are about as fit to sit on a stool in the counting-house of Crumpett and Hawker as Pontius Pilate was to sit on the Board of Governors of Eternal Bliss. I suppose you'll be saying next you have never heard of Eton and Oxford."

"E-Eton and O-Oxford," said the boy. His desperate ignorance caused him to take a leap in the dark. "Oh, y-y-yes," he said anxiously, "I — I s-suppose, sir, they would be eminent p-publishers the same as Messrs. Crumpett and Hawker."

"Stars above!" Mr. Dodson so far forgot the exigencies of polite life as to dance several steps in public. "If you go on at this rate, my son, we shall have to have you bled for the simples. I must get Pa to tell that to Octavius. Why can't you see, lunatic, that Octavius has got Eton and Oxford written all over him, and therefore that every cove in the counting-house of Crumpett and Hawker, from Pa himself who sits at a table and snubs his betters

to underpaid menials like you and me, have got to have Eton and Oxford written all over them too."

"I — I d-don't understand," the boy stammered feebly.

"What is there to understand, fathead?" said Mr. Dodson. "It simply means that like everybody else, you have got to take Octavius for your model. Of course you needn't keep it up out of office hours unless you like. Only chaps with a strong constitution can keep it up all the time."

"I — I d-don't understand," said the boy.

"You Juggins!" said Mr. Dodson, whose scorn sought in vain to express itself adequately. "The whole thing is so simple. If you are going to keep your stool in the counting-house of Crumpett and Hawker, you have got to show yourself up to the traditions of the house. I can't talk plainer. You have got to copy Octavius. Of course he means nothing, but he is very impressive. Some of the staff say it's Eton and some say it's Oxford, but Pa says it's a blend. And you can lay to it Pa knows. I'll tell you what I'll do, my son; if you are a good boy, and can only learn to use the right-colored wax and to paste those labels the right side up, one of these days I will take you round into Pall Mall, and you shall watch Octavius go up the steps of his club."

By the time this munificent offer had been made by Mr. Dodson, with an air of quiet patronage which became him extremely well, he and the be-

wildered neophyte, whose education he had undertaken, had come to the brass plate of No. 24 Trafalgar Square. As soon as they had entered these halcyon portals they encountered one of the fortunate ones of a world in which the favors are by no means impartially dispensed, in the person of a young gentleman, who thus early in life had been called to the high office of administering to the personal good-will and pleasure of the head of the firm, and of whom in consequence all the other junior members of the staff were inordinately jealous. Mr. Dodson's manner of addressing this luminary, was in such memorable contrast to the one he had lately been using, that even such a one as William Jordon, Junior, who in the phrase of Mr. Dodson, "was no more than fivepence ha'penny to the shilling," was fain to observe it.

"Davis," said Mr. Dodson, "has Mr. Octavius gone out yet to luncheon?"

"Yes, Dodson," said Mr. Davis. "Mr. Octavius *has* gone out to luncheon. He went out at twenty minutes to two, to lunch with Sir Topman Murtle at the Marlborough."

"Ah," said Mr. Dodson, with aristocratic self-possession bordering on indifference. "Is Murtle selling?"

"Yes, Dodson," said Mr. Davis blandly, "Sir Topman *is* selling. The tenth enormous impression completing two hundred thousand copies, has

been called for by the Trade within twenty-four days of publication."

"H'm," said Mr. Dodson, concealing a yawn in a very well-bred manner. "If he goes on he will beat Lavinia."

"No, Dodson," said Mr. Davis dissenting delicately, "Miss Lavinia Longborn Gentle once had two hundred thousand copies called for by the Trade in twenty-four hours."

"Going out now to luncheon, Davis?"

"Yes, Dodson, I am."

As Mr. Davis sauntered out in a manner entirely worthy of Mr. Dodson himself, William Jordan, Junior, with his odd and unaccountable natural courtesy, which had already baffled many who had come in contact with it, opened the door that he might pass through.

"Why did you open the door for that young swine?" said Mr. Dodson, with an extremely rapid reversion to his out-of-doors manner. "If you do it again you and I will quarrel. He is as full of side as he can stick. He would even like *me* to dip my ensign; he would like me to call him 'Mr.'—*me*, if you please, call *him*. I ought to have had his berth; everybody in the office said I was better qualified. He got it by a trick. I will tell you what he did. He signed his name in the time-book, *George Eliot Davis*, and he had no more right to do so than I have. Next day I signed myself *Matthew Arnold Dodson*,

but it was too late. Octavius had already seen his name in the book and had promoted him up-stairs."

With this tragical fragment of autobiography, Mr. Dodson and William Jordan, Junior, ascended their stools in the left-hand corner of the counting-house.

The second week of the boy's sojourn in the high latitudes to which an inscrutable providence had called him was as chequered as his first. His fate was postponed; the sword, ever ready to descend, hung in mid-air, suspended by a thread. The theory of the previous week that the boy was deficient mentally, had received such ample confirmation that it had come to rank as established fact. Many anecdotes were already in circulation concerning an intellectual weakness that was now common knowledge. Mr. Dodson was the author of the majority of these; and owing to the fact that his superintendence of the boy's education permitted him to obtain first-hand evidence, he had acquired among the staff a kind of vogue as a *raconteur*, which formerly it had not been his good fortune to enjoy.

To the well-furnished mind of that philosopher every cloud was lined with silver. Luney's education cost him infinite pains and expenditure of temper in the course of a day, but the halo cast by the mere recital of his latest vagaries was ample compensation. Their fame had even evoked the august notice of the occupant of the low table. Mr. Walter Pater Walkinshaw in his capacity of a vigilant student of

the human heart, and part author with Robert Brigstock, M.A. (Cantab.), who sat up-stairs, of *The Fluctuations of a Discerning Spirit*, published anonymously and now in its fourth edition, this august but benign personage inclined a tolerant and sympathetic ear to the anecdotes so racily narrated by Mr. Dodson.

"I don't think you know the latest, sir, about young Jordan," said that eminent worldling about half-past three, as he sauntered up to the low table with the simper of a dean at a dinner party. "I took him out to luncheon this morning, sir, and I ask you, sir, what do you think he ate?"

"Tell me, Dodson," said Mr. W. P. Walkinshaw indulgently, as he dipped thoughtfully, as he invariably did, and began a letter, "Very Reverend and Dear Sir."

"He ate, sir," said Mr. Dodson impressively, "one slice of thin bread-and-butter, and he sipped a small glass of milk."

"Ha, ha, very good, very good!" said Mr. W. P. Walkinshaw, as he began writing, "Messrs. Crumpett and Hawker have had the extreme gratification of reading the MS. of your very able and deeply thoughtful work, *The Genuflections of a Natural Christian*." Having committed this sentence to paper he paused ere he shaped the next, and said in that manner which expert criticism allowed to be almost as "authentic" as that of Mr. Octavius himself, "Tell me, Dodson, do you candidly consider that

young Jordan is fit to occupy a stool in the counting-house of Crumpett and Hawker?"

Mr. Dodson, whose technique was far too fine to reply off-hand to a direct canvass of his judgment by one of the calibre of Mr. Walter Pater Walkinshaw, notwithstanding that he was in a position to do so, appeared to parry the question delicately.

"Well, sir," he said, with such an approximation to the manner of Mr. Octavius, that for a moment the luminary at the low table had the illusion that he had presumed to catechize the head of the firm, "well sir," said Mr. Dodson, "since you — ah, put the question point-blank, as one might say, perhaps it is incumbent upon one to observe that whatever opinion one may form, one may not always feel justified in — ah, giving it expression."

"One respects your scruples immensely, Mr. Dodson, they do you credit," said Mr. W. P. Walkinshaw, who also respected that eminent worldling's diction and mode of utterance immensely, although he did not say so; "but I invite you, Mr. Dodson, to be perfectly frank. I need not say your frankness will go no farther."

"Well, sir, if you really *press* the question," said Mr. Dodson, with a simplicity he did not feel, "I have — ah, come to the con-clusion, reluctantly to the con-clusion that William Jordan, Junior, idiomatically speaking, is not more than fivepence ha'penny to the shilling."

"That is to say, Dodson," said Mr. Walter Pater

Walkinshaw, "in your opinion he is *non compos mentis*?"

"That is so, sir, putting it classically, which unfortunately I am not in the habit of doing myself," said Mr. Dodson. "In fact, sir, since you appear to press the question, it is my opinion that allowing for the usual trade discount, fivepence ha'penny to the shilling is nothing like good enough for the counting-house of Crumpett and Hawker."

"I agree with you, Dodson, I am entirely of that opinion myself," said Mr. W. P. Walkinshaw, sighing deeply. "And I assume it behoves one to convey such an opinion to Mr. Octavius."

This suggestion, however, plunged Mr. Dodson in deep thought. Such a verdict had only to be presented to the head of the firm, for his extreme solicitude for the traditions of Crumpet and Hawker, to ensure the immediate dismissal of William Jordan, Junior. And in the light of that day's developments, during their first luncheon together, such a consummation was not wholly to be desired.

"There is just one point, sir," said Mr. Dodson, "that is if one is free to mention it."

"Pray do so by all means," said Mr. W. P. Walkinshaw, with a bland encouragement.

"It occurs to me, sir," said Mr. Dodson, "that William Jordan, Junior's — ah, shortness of measure may be due to *greenness*, as one might say."

"Your metaphor is a little mixed, Dodson," said Mr. Walter Pater Walkinshaw affably, "but I think

your meaning is sufficiently clear. You would say he lacks experience of life?"

"That is it, sir, exactly," said Mr. Dodson, "that is just what I wanted to say. My private impression is that his education has been seriously neglected."

"That is a serious indictment, Mr. Dodson," said Mr. W. P. Walkinshaw gravely. "A very serious indictment."

"It would be, sir, in the case of another, I am free to confess," said Mr. Dodson, with a guile that would have embellished the primeval serpent; "but then, you see, sir, in spite of ed-u-ca-tional disadvantages, Nature has thought fit to reserve a point in favor of William Jordan, Junior."

"Ah," said Mr. W. P. Walkinshaw, "what pray, is that point that Nature has reserved in his favor?"

"William Jordan, Junior, may not be a scholar," said Mr. Dodson, speaking with the calm humility of those who have served their novitiate to the mysteries, "but in the best sense of the word, sir, he is a gentleman."

"Ah," said Mr. W. P. Walkinshaw, with a sudden accession of interest to his eminently serious and somewhat melancholy eyes, "that is interesting; one is glad to know that."

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Dodson with quiet confidence, for unmistakably he was well on the target; "whatever young Jordan is, or whatever he is not, he can't *help* being a gentleman."

"One has noticed it oneself," said Mr. Walter Pater Walkinshaw. "May one ask, Dodson, has your knowledge been gained empirically, or are you in the possession of data which have been privately communicated?"

"Well, sir," said Mr. Dodson, "he has not said a word about his family; but if it is not a good deal above the common my name is not Matthew Arnold Dodson. I believe, sir, his mental training is entirely due to a maiden aunt who lives in the neighborhood of Hither Green — I believe, sir, he was left an orphan at a tender age — but his manners and behavior seem to have been handed down. Personally, I do not doubt, sir, for a single moment that Mr. Octavius was right when he allowed him to take his seat in our midst."

"The judgment at which you have arrived does you infinite credit, Dodson," said Mr. Walter Pater Walkinshaw. "It is also a tribute to a fun-da-mental goodness of heart. There can be no doubt whatever that Mr. Octavius was quite right."

Mr. Dodson totally ignored a compliment that one of less calibre would have felt constrained to accept with embarrassment.

"I, for one, sir," said Mr. Dodson confidentially, "place implicit faith in the judgment of Mr. Octavius. Personally, sir, I have never seen it betray a sign of being at fault."

"You are right, Dodson, you are perfectly right," said Mr. Walter Pater Walkinshaw with great cor-

diality. "I feel more indebted to your judgment than I am able to express."

Mr. Dodson, girt by the knowledge that complete success had crowned his devices yet again, and fortified also with the feeling that once more he had laid an unerring finger on the pulse of that great establishment, sauntered back to his stool in the left-hand corner with that somewhat sinister nonchalance which must so often clothe natural eminence when it has been brought into contact with an eminence that is merely official. In his own phrase — out of office hours —"Pa had not half as much about him as the back of a coster's dog."

On the other hand, Mr. Walter Pater Walkinshaw, unlike so many whose intellectual attainments are merely of the second class, was uncommonly susceptible to the impact of those of the first.

"Luff," said he, "do you know who I think will one day be the head of this world-famous house?"

"Who?" observed Mr. Aristophanes Luff.

"Matthew Arnold Dodson."

"Surely, surely that is a remote contingency," observed Mr. Aristophanes Luff with a purr of mild protest.

"Yes, Luff, that is my deliberate opinion. For breadth of view, aplomb of manner, maturity of judgment, knowledge of the world and of the human heart, there are few youths in all this great metropolis to compare with Matthew Arnold Dodson."

Inferiority of station and mildness of disposition

prevented Mr. Aristophanes Luff from controverting what he felt obliged to regard as an extravagant judgment. He was content to wipe his spectacles, and to blow his nose in as clear a key of dissonance as an innate weakness of character could compass.

In the meantime, the subject of this remarkable eulogium, seated on his high stool dispensing wisdom, instruction and stinging rebuke to the bewildered and trembling recipient of these commodities had no such exalted sentiments for its author.

"I tell you, Luney," said Mr. Dodson, with an expression on his wizened countenance that would not have been unbecoming to that of Voltaire, "I can't make up my mind whether Pa is a bigger ass than Octavius, or whether Octavius is a bigger ass than Pa. Octavius is a pompous ass, and Pa is a sentimental ass. Octavius has a bit of sentiment in his pomp, and Pa has a bit of pomp in his sentiment; so I suppose one takes the cruet and the other takes the casters. Bah, it makes me sick to think that you and I have to keep dipping the ensign to a couple of amateurs who don't know they are born! They have about as much knowledge of the game they are trying to play as a sucking-pig has of brown sherry. But you must promise me, Luney, to let this go no further."

"Oh, n-n-no, sir, I will not," said the boy, not knowing in the least what it was he must let go no further.

"Look here," said his mentor truculently; "if you say 'sir' to me again I shall smack your head, and I shall smack it hard. This is the third time to-day I have warned you. Pull yourself together. You are not now with your Aunt Priscilla at Beaconsfield Villa, Hither Green. You are in the counting-house of Crumpett and Hawker, my son, and the sooner you understand that the better it will be for everybody. I shall not show you how to tie a double knot any more. The next time I shall put my hand round your ear; and it will hurt. If I had not been the best-hearted chap that ever swaggered round the second circle at the Empire on a Saturday night, you would have got the boot this very afternoon. Pa wanted to report you to Octavius. But I stood firm. 'No, Father,' I said, 'the youth is off his filbert, but so was Blair Athol when he won the Derby.' There, over goes the paste! Don't stand gazing at it, you lunatic, but get some back numbers of *The Athenæum* and mop it up."

XIX

It is not to be surmised that William Jordan, Junior, was in any sense *persona gratissima* in the distinguished society in which he was called upon to move between the hours of eight and seven. In the eyes of Mr. James Dodson, who, apparently, had annexed the entire zone of practical wisdom as his province — at least, his range of lore was amazing, his tactics on all occasions, in the office and out of it, were masterly in the extreme, while his consummate address and fertility of resource had long been the despair of all who had been admitted to the honor of his intercourse — in the eyes of this considerable scholar in the stern school of experience, William Jordan, Junior, was no more than an object of contemptuous compassion. At the hands of this austere master of "hard-shell" practicality he was the daily recipient of much profound advice which probed the depths of human wisdom, tempered by more or less severe personal chastisement to help him to assimilate it.

"They say Nature gives one talent to every cove gratis," Mr. Dodson would say as he proceeded thoughtfully to administer reproof and correction, "but this talent of yours takes a deal of finding, my son."

During the first weeks of the boy's servitude he had much to endure. After the first flush of his triumph had faded, and it burnt itself out almost as soon as it was born, there was nothing but dogged patience and continual prayers to sustain him in the course of life which had been marked out as his own. All too soon the exaltation that attended the triumph over the apparently insurmountable was succeeded by a profound dejection. A new and very poignant terror was added to an existence which, from its first hour, had been overfreighted with suffering.

He gained surprisingly in the practical sciences in the course of those first weeks, as his father in the little room was forced to confess, yet at what an expenditure of spirit, none — not even himself — might estimate. And almost the first piece of vital knowledge that he acquired in regard to the relation of that profoundly surprising and deeply inscrutable enigma, William Jordan, Junior, to its own surroundings, was that William Jordan, Junior, had a total lack of the primary essential to a life in the great world out of doors. It was necessary to act, to do; and as he lay in his bed through the long watches of the night staining his pillow with a silent and bitter anguish, he had to make the confession to himself that the capacity for action was not his.

Sometimes when left quite alone, his hands and limbs and thoughts would obey the dictates of his

will; but at the behest of the cruelly critical and unsympathetic street-persons, by whom he was encompassed, he was unable to command his faculties. The simplest act, the mere carrying of a book from one desk to another, the addressing of an envelope, the counting of a pile of letters, all such elementary duties as these frequently lay beyond his power.

It was not that he did not strive to overcome his own contemptible shortcomings. Every hour he passed in the counting-house of Crumpett and Hawker he exerted his will to its fullest, yet the result only brought down an ampler meed of censure, ill-temper, stern reproaches, and what, as his knowledge increased and he came to understand it, hurt him the most cruelly, wounding satire upon him. After he had spent a fortnight at No. 24 Trafalgar Square, the long room with the clerks on their high stools, and the quiet, bald-headed gentleman at the low table in their midst, dominated his thoughts like a hideous dream. Sleeping and awake this dreadful place darkened his mind. He would lie all the night through living again all the tragic transactions of the past day, or foreshadowing in his intensely vivid imagination the doubtless more tragic transactions of the morrow.

As a rule, about an hour before it was imperative he should rise from his bed if he were to be at No. 24 Trafalgar Square as the clock struck eight, he would be worn out by sheer fatigue, and would

fall into a light, fitful doze. Then as the hour for rising came, he would shudder with horror, although his brain was still half-dazed with the pangs of weariness it could not satisfy, and he would creep with his too-sensitive limbs from the grateful warmth of the blankets into the bitter inclemency of a new and dreadful day.

The unremitting diligence he was called upon to exercise every day of the week between the hours of eight and seven, to which was added a degree of mental travail which none of the remorseless task-masters about him could even suspect, began ere the first month had run its course, to tell visibly upon his physical powers. As night after night he crept back silently into the little room, with his cheeks paler and more hollow, his forehead more scarred, his eyes more sunken, and at every one of these joyless returns a heavier hue of tragedy upon his face, a keener pang would be born in the heart of the aged man who was there to await him.

"You ask no questions now, beloved one," his father would say mournfully. "And you read no longer in the ancient authors. Can it be, Achilles, that already you are well enough found in knowledge?"

"I begin to believe, my father," said the boy, "that my knowledge is already too great."

His tone was such as his father had never heard before from his lips.

"I seem to know already, my father, that I am

not of the blood royal," he said, with his speech falling thick; "'I begin to feel that I shall never be admitted into that most high company that holds festival with Zeus. I am the craven-hearted one, my father; for such as me there is no place in the great world out of doors."

The boy laid his tired eyes to the wood of the table with a gesture of despair.

"Courage, beloved one," said his father, laying his hands about his shoulders with a woman's tenderness. "Every strong soul now in Hades had its moment of repining. These mighty ones were often in tears."

No words, however, would bring consolation to the boy.

"There is no place in the great world out of doors for the craven-hearted," he would say continually at this time.

Upon the evening of the last day of the fourth week his father proposed to him that he should spare a frame that by now seemed no more than a reed.

"I think I must tell you, Achilles," he said, "that our little room is in no immediate danger of being taken from us. I have been thinking that perhaps it were better that you rested from your too-great labors for a while."

"No, no, my father," said the boy almost fiercely for one of such strange gentleness, "I was fearing that you would speak to me thus."

"Other labors might be found for you," said his father; "labors, my noble Achilles, more consonant to your quality."

"No, no, my father," said the boy, "I would not have you speak thus to a flesh that is frail with its weakness. And pray mock me with the name of Achilles no more."

"Is it a mockery, beloved one, to call a hero by the name he has always borne?" said his father.

The boy rose from the table with haggard cheeks.

"I have no right to bear so great a name," he said. "I usurped it upon no better pretext than a false and beguiling ignorance. I pray you, my father, do not mock me with that name. It is the badge of other clay than this. My valor is too little. I am the constant sport of the great world out of doors."

"Art thou the first hero who has been despised, beloved one?" said his father.

"I can wear no proud name," said the boy, refusing all consolation, "until I have won it at the point of the sword. In this little room of ours I am Achilles; but in the great world out of doors I am another, and him the great world out of doors accounts as less than nought."

About the time the sixth week of his labors passed, he said one evening to his father, when overcome with despair, "I think, my father, I have learned too little or too much. I find that the great world

out of doors is not at all as the ancient authors have depicted it in their writings; yet I cannot believe that they would play me false. But it is all most strange. The world of men and things is not in the least as rendered to me by the books in the shop. I cannot comprehend it; and yet sometimes I seem to comprehend it beyond the measure of my strength."

"I think, beloved one," said his white-haired father softly, "the time is now at hand when you may be permitted to look into the volume yonder upon the shelf. Who knows that it may not melt a little of the darkness from your heart?"

Weak and spent as the boy now was, at these words his pulses thrilled with expectation. From his earliest childhood this high moment had been in his thoughts. And now it had come upon him suddenly in an hour when least anticipated, and when the least merited. It was the evening of Saturday of the sixth week, and it had seemed as he had crept over the threshold of the little room that any prolongation of the term through which he had passed would break him in pieces. To live through another week like the one from which he had just emerged would be beyond the strength of his frame.

But this proposal of his father's, just as he felt his strength to be failing, had endowed his veins with new life. How many times had he feasted his imagination on that mysterious tome which was

bound so massively, wherein his father read! Would it ever be his happiness to read in it too? And now the hour was at hand!

"Canst thou raise the volume from the shelf, Achilles?" his father asked.

"If Achilles cannot, my father," said the boy, "he is fit neither to live nor to die."

Yet the next moment, in dire anguish, he had made the discovery that his frame was so weak that it could not lift the massive volume from the shelf.

"It is as I feared," he gasped; "I am fit neither to live nor to die."

Three times he essayed to raise the mighty tome; three times he failed.

"I will raise it for thee, beloved one," said his father.

"No, no, my father," he cried wildly, "I am not fit to read in the book until I have the strength to bear it in my arms."

Totally vanquished in mind and body, he crept up the dark stairs to his room. Without sufficient strength to remove his clothes he flung himself down, burying his eyes in the pillows of the bed; and the next day being Sunday, he slept deeply, dreamlessly, with entire abandonment until six o'clock in the evening. He was awakened by the metallic tinkling of bells.

When he awoke and walked down the stairs into the little room it seemed that a pall had been lifted

from his spirit. He discovered his father to be reading in the mighty tome.

"First I will eat, my father," he said, "and then I will try again."

His father replaced the great book upon the shelf, and then set before him a basin of food he had prepared with his own hands.

"There is flesh in it," said the boy, making a gesture of repugnance.

"It may enable you, Achilles, to raise the book from the shelf," said his father.

It cost the boy infinite distress to swallow the gross food, but he did so at last. For now he felt strong in mind and body, owing to the wonderful refreshment of sleep. And having supped more resolutely than for many weeks past, he said, "And now, my father, if it is the will of the Most High I will bear the great volume in my hands."

To his unspeakable joy the power was rendered to him to lift it from the shelf. He placed it upon the table, and unlocked it with a curious key his father gave him.

"Perhaps it were well to invoke the Most High, my father," he said, "that my eyes may prove faithful unto me."

They knelt together in the little room.

The boy opened the volume at the first page of vellum. He could scarcely breathe because of the beating of his heart. Yet the faded red characters,

a thousand years old, proved beyond the power of his understanding. His learning was such that it could comprehend the curious words that they formed; it could surmount the antique spelling; but when with consummate skill he had rendered what was there written into strange phrases, they bodied forth no meaning.

"Oh, my father, what is this?" he cried in consternation. "I see, but I do not heed; I behold, but I do not understand." The tragic hue of his countenance grew deeper. "I beseech thee, gentle-hearted One," he cried aloud, "do not make me also the sport of the Most High!"

"Patience, Achilles," said his father, with a smile of strange beauty.

His father himself turned over the crinkling parchments of the massive volume. He turned to a middle page in the strange old book, and ever smiling softly, placed his finger upon a particular passage.

"Look again, beloved one," said his father.

The boy bore again his fearful eyes to the faded yellow page. Slowly he spelt out the words and represented them to his mind. Then he paused and gathered himself to his full height. His chin was upheld, his hands were clenched, his eyes were closed, his slow-drawn breaths were audible. Quite suddenly the ineffable look of his father's appeared in his face.

"Yes, yes, yes, I understand, I understand!" he muttered to himself. "My father," he broke out

with a wild little cry, "these must be the words of the first author in the world!"

He flung his arms about his father's neck.

"How shall I ever requite thee, my father," he cried, "for teaching me to read in a book such as this!"

"Is it not meet, O Achilles," said his father, "that thou shouldst read in the book that the ages have wrought for their child?"

Like those of one entranced, the eyes of the boy sought the yellow page again and again. He spelt out the antique words of all that was there written, and pondered them with his finger raised to his lips. He then saluted the parchment devoutly, and again he knelt.

"I am indeed Achilles," he cried; "the magic page of the gods is spread before me!"

"Wilt thou forswear thy birthright again, O Achilles?" said his father, whose eyes were quick with many tender, yet grave, questionings.

"Never, never, O my father," cried the boy, "lest it should not be given to me to read in the Book of the Ages again!"

XX

"LUNEY, my son," said Mr. James Dodson one afternoon, "young Davis's days are numbered. This morning Octavius found him smoking in his room."

Notwithstanding the manner in which Mr. Dodson imparted this item of news, it failed to promote the curiosity of which it was undoubtedly worthy.

"Yes, Luney," Mr. Dodson proceeded, "young Davis has numbered his days. He'll come down from up-stairs. He is not geared up to a position of that kind. He hasn't got the — the intellectual quality. You can get anything by a fluke; but you can keep nothing without you've got this."

Mr. Dodson laid a finger on the centre of his forehead with a significance that was almost sinister.

"And whom do you suppose, Luney," Mr. Dodson continued, "will succeed that young upstart when he comes down from up-stairs? Give a guess, my son."

William Jordan, Junior, did not accept his mentor's cordial invitation, for the sufficient reason that the point involved was too abstruse for his knowledge of the practical sciences.

"Between you and me and the paste-pot, my

worthy lunatic," said Mr. Dodson, "there is only one candidate in the running at present. And he is the deadest of dead certainties. And the name of that dead certainty, my son, is Matthew Arnold Dodson, known familiarly out of office hours as Jimmy."

Even this announcement, although it exacted William Jordan, Junior's courteous attention, as every announcement did, failed to stimulate his feeble faculties to divine all that it implied.

"There is also another dead certainty, my son," said Mr. Dodson, "and that is that William Jordan, Junior, will never rise in this world, whatever he may do in the next."

However, upon the following morning, during the luncheon hour, this drastic opinion underwent a modification as serious as it was unexpected. It occurred in the following manner. Of late the boy had refrained from going forth to seek his luncheon in public places, being content with a few pieces of bread-and-butter which he brought from home in his pocket, and with a glass of water which he obtained on the premises. From this method of procedure, although it exposed him to the scorn of Mr. Dodson, and others eminent in the world, he derived several advantages. Foremost, and beyond all things, he was spared actual contact with the ever-surging crowd of street-persons, and from the necessity of plucking, as it were, his food from the cannon's mouth of shops and restaurants, a feat which, if attempted

by himself, invariably ended in total failure and annihilation; and if undertaken in the company of Mr. Dodson, as it sometimes was by an act of condescension on the part of that gentleman, was apt to prove expensive. Again, it enabled him to bestow more time on his duties, which seemed to demand so much; while again, so far had he been initiated already into the meaning of "what two and two made" — in the phrase of Mr. Dodson — that he divined that the less he went out to luncheon the more pieces of silver would there be for the service of the little room in the grave hour which he felt that Fate was so inexorably devising. Further, it happened in the days subsequent to his first entrancing insight into what he called "the Book of the Ages," he occasionally took the courage to carry in his pocket a small volume of the ancient authors, that he might receive sustenance in the thrice-blessed hour between one and two, when he was left to his own devices in the counting-house of Crumpett and Hawker.

It was this habit that so unexpectedly shattered the faith of the eminent worldling in whose charge he still was. It befell that he was immersed in a small black, time-stained, musty-smelling volume, with his hands over his ears, as he sat on his high stool, and his eyes pressed close to the page, when all of a sudden he received a smart blow on the cheek which made him start with surprise and wince with pain.

"None of that," said the stern voice of Mr. Dod-

son, who had crept up behind him, he having returned by a special dispensation on the part of providence, which took the form of a lack of means, some twenty minutes before his usual time. In consequence, the philosophic calm, upon which Mr. Dodson justly prided himself, was a little ruffled. "If Pa sees you there'll be trouble," he said, taking his charge by the ear for due admonishment. "*Dick Deadeye, The Adventures of Jack Sheppard,* and that sort of truck, doesn't do in the counting-house of Crumpett and Hawker. I am surprised at you, Luney, I really am."

Each of these sentences was punctuated by a solemn blow on the ear, which made the recipient gasp.

"Why, what the dooce is it?" asked Mr. Dodson, as his eye fell on the curious old black volume. "It looks like a Bible for the blind, or a privately printed copy of Magna Charta. Give it to me!"

The boy, oppressed with a dreadful sense of guilt and humiliation that he should be detected in the act of reading in the ancient authors almost on the first occasion he had attempted to do so outside the little room, yielded his treasure with a sinking heart into the ruthless grasp of his mentor.

"I k-k-knew it was w-wrong, wicked," he gasped, "to b-bring the ancient authors into the great world out of doors, but — but they give me such a great s-s-strength in my veins that ——"

"What are you burbling about, you lunatic," said Mr. Dodson truculently. "Stow it; and tell me the

name of this very fishy-looking volume. Is it a Russian hymn-book, or a bit of Chinese, or a copy of the last will and testament of Omar Khayyam, or what the dooce is it? I hope there is nothing in it there shouldn't be, that's all."

"It is the *Adventures of Odysseus*," said the boy, with the blood springing to his cheeks. Even as he spoke he speculated as to what dire fate would overtake him for having dared to expose his sacred intercourse with heroes to the scorn of the great world out of doors; yet he was fain to marvel also that one such as his mentor should not recognize at a glance the nature of his crime.

"Who's he?" said his mentor sternly. "Who in the name of thunder is Odys—— Stars above! I never saw such rum-looking stuff in my life. I should say it is a pretty fair imitation of a bad dream."

"I k-k-know it is an offense against the gods," said the culprit, with a scared face, "to bring the sacred words of Homer into the great world out of doors; but you do not know how he sustains me in my heavy tasks."

"Homer, did you say?" inquired his mentor incredulously. "Homer; why then, that's Greek!"

"Oh y-y-yes," said the boy, his fear yielding somewhat to bewilderment that one of his mentor's attainments should ply him with a question so unnecessary.

"You are not going to come it over James Dod-

son, my son, that you read Greek," said that gentleman, renouncing his own magisterial air for one of protest and astonishment.

"I b-b-bear every word of all the sacred writings of Homer imprinted in my heart," said the boy, with only a partial understanding of Mr. Dodson's very visible surprise. "P-p-perchance after the callow days of our childhood have passed, when the mind is like sand, it is a violation of the dream knowledge that has grown up all about our hearts to turn yet again to those pages in which the great wonders were first revealed to us. But even to this hour I love to gaze on the printed pages which these long years have lain in my soul."

Mr. Dodson paid no heed to the strange and incoherent phrases which proceeded from the lips of William Jordan, Junior. He was too greatly preoccupied with an examination of the curious volume that was now in his hands. After turning it over and inspecting it inside and out a look of immense perplexity settled upon his wizened countenance.

"My aunt!" he said, "it *is* Homer."

He looked from the book to the boy, from the boy to the book.

"Luney," he said, with slow drawn solemnity, "you beat cock-fighting, you do."

The boy quailed under a gaze, whose blank surprise he misinterpreted as some more truculent emotion.

"Why, do you know, my son," said Mr. Dodson,

"it takes Pa himself all his time to read Homer without a crib."

This contribution to national biography awoke no response in the breast of the boy.

"And yet, Luney," said Mr. Dodson, in a voice that had a thrill of emotion in it, "here are you in your dinner hour reading it as naturally as I read the *Sporting Times*. Let me look at you, you lunatic."

Mr. Dodson grasped his *protégé* by the chin in the manner in which a veterinary surgeon grasps a horse, and peered somewhat aggressively into the gentle and pale countenance of William Jordan, Junior.

"Well, all I can say is, my son," said Mr. Dodson, after he had concluded his researches with a thoroughness which made the subject of them tremble, "all I can say is you can't be such a blighter as you look."

William Jordan, Junior, could frame no reply to this profound judgment.

"How old are you, Luney?" Mr. Dodson inquired.

"E-eighteen years and f-fifty-nine days, sir," stammered William Jordan, Junior.

"My aunt!" said Mr. Dodson, with incredulity, "you don't look a day more than twelve and a half. You might travel half-fare on the District Railway."

Suddenly Mr. Dodson clenched his hands.

"Luney," said he vehemently, "do you suppose if *I* were you *I* should be sitting down-stairs on a

high stool? Not me. You ought to go far, my son, you ought. But you never will. You haven't got it about you; and," concluded Mr. Dodson grimly, "it is a good thing for some of us you ain't."

Having permitted himself a freedom of speech which he felt to be highly injudicious, Mr. Dodson returned Homer to the boy without seeing fit to administer further physical correction, and retired to the fire-place to stand with his back thereto and his coat-tails outspread, that favorite attitude of so many searching intellects, and proceeded, in his own phrase, "to take his bearings."

Mr. Dodson's first and most natural instinct was to heighten his already considerable reputation as an after-luncheon *raconteur*, by advertising this new facet to the character of him upon whom he had bestowed the title of "The Marvel." But however great his thirst for the notoriety of a little brief applause, the mature outlook of the man of the world was soon able to correct it. "Mum is the word, my son," said the philosopher, as the warmth of the fire communicated itself pleasantly to his being. "Mum is the word. If it should come to the ears of Octavius that that kid reads Greek in his luncheon hour for his own amusement, he will go up-stairs and no earthly power can prevent it. And," he added, "if that kid does go up-stairs where will you be, Matthew Arnold Dodson?"

The philosopher did not deem it necessary to frame a reply to these reflections, but sauntered across the

room to the high stool on which was seated the subject of them.

"Luney," he said, slowly and impressively, "you are a highly-educated youth, I quite recognize that, but it is not considered the thing to read Greek in the counting-house of Crumpett and Hawker. I have only one word of advice to give you. If by chance you should *ever* let Pa catch you reading it, it will mean serious trouble for you, my son, for you must not forget that it is as much as Pa himself can do to read Homer in the original."

It reassured Mr. Dodson's sense of propriety to observe that the boy had already returned the opprobrious volume to his pocket. "Let us hope he will keep it there," he said under his breath piously.

That evening, as the clock told the hour of seven, William Jordan, Junior, was honored by the most signal act of condescension on the part of his mentor that had as yet been vouchsafed to him.

"Luney," said Mr. Dodson, "your best way to Milton Street, E.C., is to go down the Strand and to take a 'bus from Ludgate Circus. I am going down the Strand myself; if you like we will toddle down together."

A few minutes later William Jordan, Junior, might have been discerned walking down the Strand in association with his mentor. The eminent worldling had his arm within that of his *protégé*.

"Luney," he said, "out of office hours you can call me Jimmy."

As they went their way, with the whole of the conversation furnished entirely by one only of the parties to it, Mr. Dodson produced an elaborate silver case.

"Smoke?" he said.

"Oh, n-n-no," said the boy, startled in much the same way as he would have been had he been asked whether he committed murders.

"Pity," said Mr. Dodson, as he selected a cigarette from the silver case with the unmistakable air of the connoisseur. "Ought to. Great thing for the nerves. Though perhaps you are not troubled with 'em. I shouldn't say myself that you lived at very high pressure."

At the end of Fleet Street master and pupil parted company.

"Ta ta, old boy," said Mr. Dodson, with a genial wave of the hand. "I go round the corner to the station. Nice time for the 7.50 to Peckham. That's your 'bus — the green one. Ta ta; one of these days we will do a music-hall together."

Mr. Dodson stood to watch the frail figure enter the green 'bus.

"Absolutely the rummest kid I ever struck," said he. "Fancy a thing like that able to read Homer in the original! Well, I will say this — he don't put on side about it like most chaps would."

With this reflection the philosopher turned the corner, immediately to engage in a war of words, in which he did not come off second best, with the driver of a "growler," who nearly ran over him as he stepped somewhat unwarily off the pavement.

XXI

In the course of the following week an announcement was made which marked an epoch in the history of the great publishing house of Crumpett and Hawker.

However, before this event had burgeoned forth upon the counting-house staff, Mr. M. Arnold Dodson, with whose individual destiny it was concerned, continued to live in that condition of soul-distraction, to which it would seem even the most philosophic minds are susceptible, which is known as hope deferred.

All the week Mr. Dodson had waited in vain to be summoned into the presence of authority, to receive the seal of official recognition to which he felt his mature talents were unquestionably entitled. He had set his heart upon the dethronement of young Davis. To that other accomplished worldling, who in mere point of age was a year older than himself, he never referred without the prefix "young." But the misdemeanor of which that successful adventurer had been convicted, of smoking in the room of the head of the firm, had not as yet borne the fruit that Mr. Dodson had confidently predicted. Mr. Davis was still enthroned in high places, triumphant still in his original deceit; every morning he appended his signature in

the time-book, G. Eliot Davis, 9.15, not the least among the Olympians whose seat was on the second story; while Mr. M. Arnold Dodson, in every way his superior in moral and mental attainment, still languished in the comparative obscurity of the counting-house below.

On two occasions during that week had Mr. Dodson walked into the Strand during the luncheon hour, and had purchased an extremely pungent cigar, for which he had disbursed the sum of one penny. Armed with this implement he had stolen up-stairs in the absence of the staff during the hour of luncheon, and had smoked it grimly and relentlessly in the middle of the sanctuary of Mr. Octavius Crumpett. Melancholy to relate, however, in spite of the physical pangs endured by the heroic Mr. Dodson, who in the very act of informing William Jordan, Junior, that "that young Davis had been smoking again in Octavius's room," had to make a sudden and somewhat undignified exit to the back of the building — in spite of such tribulations as these the wicked, in the person of G. Eliot Davis, continued to flourish in that time-honored fashion which had been celebrated by Holy Writ.

"Luney," said Mr. Dodson, with an unaffected pathos in his voice, when the second of these heroic efforts to dethrone the unrighteous had been fraught with no other compensation than that of suffering of a purely physical kind, which is too often the reward of human nature's disinterestedness, "Luney,

it fairly turns me sick to see that young Davis walk up those stairs. I shouldn't mind, you know, I shouldn't mind at all if he had played the game. But he got where he is by a trick, and it is doing him no kindness to try to gloss it over."

Upon the delivery of this altogether admirable piece of morality touched by emotion, Mr. M. Arnold Dodson, for the second time that afternoon, retired to the back of the building with a haste which scarcely harmonized with his natural dignity.

As he returned with an unwonted pallor upon a countenance which as a rule bore evidence of being soundly nourished, whom should he meet, as if by the irony of circumstance, but Mr. G. Eliot Davis descending the stairs. For once the eminent philosopher and man of the world seemed to lack the moral strength to encounter one whom he could only regard in the light of a successful adventurer. Therefore he strove to escape without attempting to outface a demeanor, which in his view was flown to an exaggerated degree with the insolence of office. This afternoon, however, he was not able to control the fates.

"Dodson," said Mr. G. Eliot Davis, in the tone which Mr. Dodson made a point of describing as "insufferable"; "Dodson," said Mr. Davis, "perhaps it may interest you to know that Mr. Octavius's personal translation of Homer's Odyssey will be issued to the Trade on Monday next."

"Thank you, Davis," said Mr. Dodson, with the

self-command that the great display on great occasions. "I am glad to know that, very glad indeed."

Mr. Dodson's official duties should have led him there and then into the counting-house of Crumpett and Hawker; but as he stood to watch the small but stout, erect, and prosperous form of Mr. G. Eliot Davis saunter out of the front entrance of No. 24 Trafalgar Square, an idea flashed across that Napoleonic brain.

Therefore, instead of returning to admonish William Jordan, Jr., for omitting to inscribe the courtesy prefix to the name of a peer's daughter in returning the manuscript copy of her verses, Mr. Dodson also sauntered forth from No. 24 Trafalgar Square. He turned the first corner and entered the refreshment buffet of the Brontë Hotel. Presiding over that hall of public entertainment was the lady of the scarlet blouse and yellow earrings. This afternoon the blouse was heliotrope, and she wore no earrings.

"Chrissie," said Mr. Dodson, "I want something to pull me together. It must be up to proof, but it must leave no odor."

"I always say you can't do better than brandy," said Chrissie, with the assured yet quiet air of the unmistakable expert. "Of course, some prefer a John Collins, or an American, or a Dog Toby, but I am not partial to so much fancy work myself."

"Same here," said Mr. Dodson. "But there must be no odor — none whatever."

"You shall have a toothful of the Waterloo, as your face seems familiar," said Chrissie benignly.

"You are a good sort, Chrissie," said Mr. Dodson, with a small display of emotion that became him perfectly. "I shall not forget you."

"My size is nine and a quarter," said the lady, as with an extreme precision she measured out a small quantity of a curiously-colored liquid from a very mysterious-looking bottle. "Jimmy, I must say you do look a bit below yourself. Has the moon come up yet?"

"Not yet," said Mr. Dodson in a tone of amiable deprecation. He was greatly indebted to the kindness of the lady in the heliotrope blouse, but her question was alien to his dignity, as was also the situation in which he found himself. Even at this period of his career all those attributes were clearly developed which in after years brought him so much distinction in political life.

"Well, if you will smoke El Destinkers at one and fourpence a hundred," said the lady in the heliotrope blouse.

"Chrissie," said Mr. Dodson impressively, after smallowing the brandy at a single gulp, "you *should* know that I am physically incapable of doing anything of the kind."

"I can smell it from here," said the lady in the heliotrope blouse.

"I know it is not considered the thing to contradict a lady," said Mr. Dodson, withdrawing two

steps from the buffet, "but you appear to have paid me the compliment of forgetting the commercial traveler who has just gone out. So long. Be good."

Mr. Dodson sauntered out of the refreshment buffet of the Brontë Hotel with the inimitable nonchalance of bearing which many, besides the lady in the heliotrope blouse, never failed to admire.

Before returning to his official duties at No. 24 Trafalgar Square, Mr. Dodson went in quest of a chemist, whom he found a few doors up the street. Of him he purchased a pennyworth of pungent pink lozenges, which immediately he proceeded to suck. He then re-entered the premises of the eminent publishing house; but instead of going forthwith to admonish William Jordan, Junior, he proceeded to wash his face, to part his hair in the middle with much care, and to re-adjust his necktie.

These preliminaries accomplished, Mr. Dodson walked very slowly and erectly up to the second story. He entered the small ante-chamber at the head of the stairs, which was dedicated to the sole use of the vigilant guardian of these Olympian altitudes, one G. Eliot Davis.

"Davis," said Mr. Dodson, peering within, "is Mr. Octavius in his room?"

"Yes, Dodson, he is," said Mr. Davis.

"Alone, Davis?"

"Alone, Dodson."

"Thank you, Davis."

"Don't mention it, Dodson."

Upon the conclusion of this exchange of courtesies, which an impartial observer might have considered as a trifle elaborated on both sides, Mr. Dodson knocked smartly and boldly, yet withal respectfully, upon the portals of Mr. Octavius Crumpett. Mr. Dodson entered the august presence briskly, but closed the door after him with delicacy and with self-possession.

Mr. Octavius Crumpett was seated at the table in close proximity to the fire. Every letter and document, every book, every small article was arranged upon it with scrupulous nicety. The head of the firm was enjoying the academic pleasure of running a paper-knife through the close-pressed leaves, within a chaste and scholarly binding, of his personal translation of the Odyssey, which was to be issued to an expectant world upon the following Monday.

Mr. Octavius Crumpett looked up urbanely from his insidious and alluring occupation. A slight frown of perplexity almost seemed to cloud for a moment that serene brow. In his boundless conscientiousness Mr. Octavius Crumpett conceived it to be his duty to be able to remember the name of each individual member of his staff, however lowly or obscure his station. For an instant he almost feared that he had forgotten the name of the individual before him. But this moment of doubt, of almost tremulous perplexity, which did him such credit as a man, as the head of a house of eminent publishers, as an enlightened patron

of labor, passed almost as soon as it appeared, for a weak wet glint of the afternoon sun suddenly illumined the wizened countenance of the young gentleman who stood before him; and as if touched by inspiration Mr. Octavius Crumpett remembered that the name of the young gentleman was Matthew Arnold Dodson.

"Well, Mr. Dodson?" said Mr. Octavius Crumpett, in that tone and manner which were ever the despair and admiration of his staff.

Mr. M. A. Dodson, who had already shown his consummate breeding by waiting for his chief to speak first, as though he were a royalty incarnate, bowed slightly from his full height, which was hardly more than four feet ten inches, and said in a very carefully modulated voice, "I apologize, sir, for my intrusion, but I learn that your personal translation of the Odyssey is to be issued to the Trade on Monday next."

"That is in accord with existing arrangements, I believe," said Mr. Octavius Crumpett, with a masterly implication that his well-cut diction dealt merely with human nature's daily food.

"Well now, sir," said Mr. M. A. Dodson, whose mellifluous accent might have sounded a little ingratiating had it been used by a less able practitioner, "I am taking the freedom of asking *you*, sir, whether I might purchase my own private copy this evening. The fact is, sir," Mr. M. A. Dodson added, in a burst of humble yet half-whimsical self-revelation, "I can hardly possess my soul in patience until Monday next. May I ask, sir, would it be *infra dignitatem* if I were

to obtain my own copy this evening? I am particularly anxious to have the opportunity of studying the entire achievement — I feel sure, sir, I am justified in applying beforehand that much abused word — before the journals of professional criticism, which are very excellent in their way, which I needn't tell *you*, sir, I read every week, have had the opportunity of swaying my private judgment."

Mr. Octavius Crumpett paused, with his solid silver paper-knife suspended in the air, to listen to this masterful piece of elocution on the part of Mr. M. A. Dodson. As the delicately enunciated phrases fell from those gently simpering lips, quite as they would have proceeded from those of the listener himself, an emotion of pleasure and gratitude percolated through the entire being of this good and benign gentleman. That portion of his being which was arrayed in a waistcoat of immaculate whiteness rose and fell in visible accord with the internal harmony. The traditions of the house of Crumpett and Hawker were never so secure as in the keeping of even one of the latest additions to its clerical staff. By some mysterious means the rarefied air of that establishment had wrought already upon one of the least considerable of its members.

"Mr. Dodson," said Mr. Octavius Crumpett, speaking with obvious emotion, "it will — ah, give me *immense* pleasure if you will accept the first copy of my — ah, little book."

"It will delight me, sir, of course, to accept the

first copy," said Mr. M. A. Dodson, speaking with a quiet dignity and a mature reserve which became him superbly; "it will *overwhelm* me with honor, but if my acceptance of the first copy could in any way be misconstrued — that is, sir, I mean to say, the freedom I have been guilty of in coming here this afternoon to speak to you on the subject could be misconstrued — I should greatly prefer to obtain the first copy by purchase in the usual manner. And after all, sir," Mr. M. A. Dodson concluded, with an arch smile, "if you will permit me to say it, sir, the laborer is worthy of his hire. If this custom, sir, became in any sense general of an author giving away his own works, every author, sir, would either have to become his own publisher, or every publisher would have to become his own author."

The glow behind the immaculate waistcoat of Mr. Octavius Crumpett was heightened to such a degree by these scruples, and by the cultivated terms in which they gained expression, that the good man was fain to embody it by beaming like a seraph.

"Pray, my dear Mr. Dodson," purred his august employer, "do not vex a nice conscience with scruples that are not in the least necessary. I shall be *charmed* if you will allow me to present you with the first copy of my — ah, little book. Will you kindly ask Mr. Davis to give you one of the copies set apart for review; and if, Mr. Dodson, you will take an early opportunity of telling me *precisely* what you think

about it I shall be honored indeed, for I perceive, Mr. Dodson, that you have a real and deep love of letters."

The manner in which Mr. M. A. Dodson took leave of Mr. Octavius Crumpett was entirely worthy, in the amplest sense, of two such ornaments of their age. As the head of the firm watched the close-knit figure of Mr. M. A. Dodson recede through the door of his room, he said for his own private delectation: "This house undoubtedly has an atmosphere of its own. It seems to exude an aroma. That is a very remarkable youth; a youth of precocious attainment. He talks like a book."

Mr. M. Arnold Dodson, with his hand on the door of Mr. G. Eliot Davis, said to himself, "I never talk to Octavius without wanting to run straight out into the street to beat out the brains of a little boy in a sailor suit."

"Davis," said Mr. Dodson, entering modestly the sanctum of that worthy, "Mr. Octavius's compliments, and will you have the kindness to give M. Arnold Dodson a review copy of his translation of Homer?"

"Have you a signed order, Dodson, to that effect?" said Mr. Davis, who cloaked his profound astonishment somewhat ineffectually in a display of officialdom.

"As you appear to doubt my bona fides, Davis," said Mr. Dodson, with leisurely dignity, "perhaps

you will have the condescension to verify them for yourself."

"Very good, Dodson," said Mr. Davis, who by now had regained his own natural self-possession, which was not inconsiderable. "Excuse me for one moment. Take a chair. Make yourself quite at home."

"I shall make myself quite at home a good deal sooner than you think, you young swine," said Mr. Dodson through clenched teeth, as Mr. Davis betook himself to the presence of Mr. Octavius Crumpett. "Jack in office! But your days are numbered, my son, your days are numbered."

The bewildered Mr. G. Eliot Davis returned and handed a copy of Mr. Octavius Crumpett's translation of the Odyssey to Mr. M. Arnold Dodson.

"Davis," said Mr. Dodson, placing the handsome volume ostentatiously under his arm, "you are a youth of intellectual gifts, but unfortunately, like many others of your type, your gifts don't take you quite far enough. You will understand a little better what I mean about this time on Monday. Good afternoon, Davis."

"Good afternoon, Dodson. Mind the stairs!" said Mr. Davis, as Mr. Dodson picked his way delicately down them.

"What does Octavius mean, I wonder, by giving *him* an advance copy?" mused Mr. Davis, pale with anger. "He knows what two and two make, does

James Dodson. I shouldn't mind a bit if only he played the game. I wish Octavius was not such a d——d old fool."

With this reflection, which it must be conceded was in somewhat questionable taste, upon the mental attainments and general calibre of his august employer, Mr. G. Eliot Davis put on his hat, and went his virtuous way to that hall of public entertainment, the annex to the Brontë Hotel, and accepted a cup of tea from the hands of the lady in the heliotrope blouse.

"Chrissie," said Mr. Davis, stirring his tea apprehensively, "that young cad, Jimmy Dodson, cut me out with you, and now he's trying to cut me out with Octavius."

"Well, Percy," said the lady in the heliotrope blouse, "if that is so you can go home to mamma. Whatever Jimmy Dodson tries to do he does."

XXII

"LUNEY, my son," said the mellifluous accents of Mr. M. A. Dodson, ascending upwards to the high stool on which was perched the assiduous form of William Jordan, Junior, "I want you to do me a personal favor. I've got here an advance copy of Octavius's translation of the Odyssey. Now, my good and virtuous boy, I want you to take it home with you to-night, read it carefully, and criticize it for all you are worth. Just make a note, like a good chap, of any particular points that strike you. If any of his truck strikes you as better than the truck of the other johnnies, you had better underline it. Or if you think some of his truck is worse than the truck of the other johnnies, put a bit of blue pencil round it. If you can suggest any improvements, so much the better. I want an expert like yourself to handle this by Monday next, before the reviews come out, see? Do this for me, Luney, old boy, and about the end of next week we'll do a music-hall together."

The brand new volume that the boy carried home reverently under his arm, was a source of great bewilderment to him that evening in the little room. Again and again he scanned the virgin pages with wondering eyes. Great names were there, great events, things and men who had been his constant com-

panions all his life long, but one and all were envisaged in an alien tongue. A strange metamorphosis had taken place. He was filled with despair. An acute sense of mystery oppressed him. He compared this new and shining tome with the old black volumes that were his priceless treasures. The mystery deepened. The letter was there in almost its original integrity; but an incommunicable something had passed away.

On the following day during the luncheon hour, William Jordan, Junior, resigned the new volume to the care of Mr. M. Arnold Dodson.

"It has not taken you long to go through it," said that gentleman, with a light of admiration in his eye, for he himself was prosecuting researches into the subject which were fraught with pain. "Let me see your notes, my son. They will help me a good deal."

William Jordan, Junior, was fain to confess that he had not thought fit to commit to paper the result of his own researches.

"You had better do so at once," said Mr. Dodson, whose stern countenance showed plainly that it would brook no trifling. "I want to take 'em to-night to the British Museum. They will help me no end."

"B-b-but," said the boy nervously, "it is n-n-not Homer."

For the moment the attitude of horror adopted by Mr. M. Arnold Dodson, seemed designed to suggest that the heavens were about to fall.

"Not Homer!" exclaimed Mr. Dodson. "Not Homer!"

He appeared to gather up each particular unit of his four feet ten inches, to lend emphasis to a reply which somehow refused to come forth.

"Not Homer!" he said after a pause whose length had ceased to make it dramatic. "Now look here, my son, I have only one word of advice to give you. You have only to let that come to the ears of Octavius, and you will be fired out of this old-established publishing house with one week's salary, and no character."

In spite, however, of the total failure of this source, to which he looked chiefly for sustenance and inspiration in his arduous undertaking, Mr. Dodson was of far too considerable a mental and moral calibre to relinquish his self-imposed task. Thus early in his career he had adopted the saying of a compatriot, for he too, like so many of our national heroes, claimed the blood of Caledonia stern and wild, upon his mother's side, "genius is an infinite capacity for taking pains," and had made it his own. Therefore in a crisis where one of other clay would have been daunted indeed, Mr. M. A. Dodson girt his loins like a veritable giant, and re-addressed himself to his labors with the greatest possible valor. Luney had failed him, as it was only reasonable to expect such a lunatic to do. It was a Napoleonic visage that crossed the threshold of a monumental building in Bloomsbury Square, immediately opposite the Hotel

Thackeray, on three consecutive evenings at the hour of seven-thirty, and stayed there with its nose pinned to unaccustomed documents until it was turned out.

Upon the afternoon of that Monday which was made memorable in the national life by the fact that upon that day, Mr. Octavius Crumpett's version of Homer was issued to the Trade, towards five o'clock on that epoch-making afternoon, the calm and self-contained right hand of Mr. M. A. Dodson smote the portal of the sanctum sanctorum of Mr. Octavius Crumpett, while in his equally calm and self-contained left hand he bore the sacred volume upon which he had been concentrating the whole of his critical faculty, which was not inconsiderable, for three days past.

"Ah, Mr. Dodson, good-morning," said Mr. Octavius Crumpett, with a benign beam in his mild eyes, as he looked up from the perusal of the list of books received by his favorite *Journal of English and Foreign Literature, Science, the Fine Arts, Music and the Drama.* It is to be observed *inter alia* that the seeming inconsistency of which this great and good man was guilty of ascribing the name of morning to five o'clock in the afternoon, was in strict accordance with the higher usage.

"Good-morning, sir," said Mr. M. Arnold Dodson, with a slightly austere but perfectly amiable self-possession.

"Is it to be my privilege, Mr. Dodson, to hear the first verdict which has been passed upon — ah, my

little book?" said Mr. Octavius Crumpett, with the expansive pleasantness of one who had received already that morning, at his favorite hall of physical and mental refreshment, the sonorously-tendered compliment of a stalwart of the Episcopal Bench, upon its long-expected-and-eagerly-looked-for appearance.

"Well, sir," said Mr. Dodson, opening at a leisure which conferred an adventitious weight upon an utterance which stood not in the least need of it; "well, sir, it is not my intention to enter into petty details nor into the minutiæ and fine points of scholarship. I think, sir, those can be resigned with every propriety into more competent hands. But what I would like to do, sir, with your kind indulgence, is to view this work as a whole. I do not know, sir, that I have any special claim to this, but I would like to say just in what manner your — ah, achievement strikes me ——"

"Pray proceed, Mr. Dodson, pray proceed," said Mr. Octavius Crumpett, as Mr. M. A. Dodson inserted one of those masterful pauses in his oratory which in after days were likely to stand him in such good stead in both houses of parliament, and on political platforms in the United Kingdom far too numerous to mention.

"My survey of your achievement as a whole, sir," Mr. M. A. Dodson continued at a forensically magnificent leisure, "can be summed up in one word. That word is the word *consummate*. To my mind, sir, the word consummate alone envisages in any ade-

quate sense that which you have achieved. I say, sir, I do not propose to go into fine points of scholarship, which even under the most favorable auspices are apt to be vexed and over-nice. I speak merely as an amateur, sir, as a humble, but ardent lover of letters. And in that capacity, sir, and in no other, as I hope, sir, you will please understand, I have been unable to refrain from underlining certain passages of your — ah, rendering which to my mind are in-comparably fe-lic-i-tous."

Mr. M. A. Dodson paused to take from his pocket a slip of paper on which was set forth a collocation of mystic numerals. Mr. Octavius Crumpett lay back in his revolving chair with closed eyes, and with his hands folded over that portion of his being that was embellished by his waistcoat of immaculate whiteness and he seemed to vibrate internally with that large content which it is only given to the good and great to feel.

"Page sixty-four, the line beginning, 'Behold the deep-shaking thunder,'" Mr. M. A. Dodson continued as he ran his fingers through the pages with that precision which is the fruit of a long and loving intercourse with books. "Now, sir, to my mind, the whole passage as far as 'all-fostering Zeus' could not be improved. To my mind, it is an incomparable advance upon Pope and upon Chapman, and even upon the extremely skillful version of the late Lord Derby. If I may be permitted to say it, sir, to my mind, the manner in which you have surmounted the well-nigh

insuperable difficulties of metre is worthy of the highest praise; and yet, sir, you do not appear to have sacrificed one iota of the sense or the spirit of the peerless original. Then, sir, page seventy-two, beginning with line eighteen, 'Treads the waves of the many-tremulous seas.' Or page ninety-one, that matchless rendering of—— But I must not pause to enumerate."

As Mr. M. A. Dodson ran his fingers with extreme rapidity through one after another of these underlined passages, a kind of generous enthusiasm communicated itself to his wizened countenance. His diction, ever touched by Attic grace, seemed presently to glow with a little of the Promethean fire. Yet never for a moment did it fall into incoherence, nor lapse from the ideal of style in spoken diction, however rapidly uttered, which was ever before him.

"In fact, sir," Mr. M. A. Dodson concluded as he came to the last passage he had underlined, "language fails me, as, sir, it has failed me from the first, to say in precisely what manner your consummate achievement has addressed my critical sense."

With this striking peroration, Mr. M. A. Dodson made as if to withdraw, but suddenly he appeared to think better of his resolution, for he returned again to the near proximity of his great and good master, and said in a modest voice, from which all traces of his infinitely creditable mental excitement had been removed, "If I dare, sir, I would ask of the author one small boon. I feel, sir, I have no right to ask it,

but if it were granted to me, it would mean the overflowing of the cup. I should cherish beyond expression, sir, and I think I can vouch for it, that in after life my children also will do the same; I should cherish beyond expression, sir, the autograph of one who is at once the author of this great book, and who is at the same time the head of this great house."

Immediately Mr. Octavius Crumpett dipped his pen in the ink and inscribed upon the first page of the volume, *Mr. Matthew Arnold Dodson, with the Author's good wishes.*

"Mr Dodson," said Mr. Octavius Crumpett, after handing back the volume to that gentleman, and curtailing in some measure a gratitude that already had been choicely expressed; "Mr. Dodson, when you go down-stairs, I shall be obliged if you will have the goodness to ask Mr. Walkinshaw to have the kindness to come and see me."

As Mr. M. A. Dodson pursued his meritorious way towards the basement of the famous building, he took occasion to knock at the door of the adjoining room.

"Enter," said a clear official tone.

"Mr. Davis," said Mr. Dodson, with a formidable politeness as he entered, and laying an unmistakable stress upon the prefix, "I have the honor to inform you that your goose is already cooked. Perhaps you will have the condescension to look at this."

With immemorial calm Mr. M. Arnold Dodson disclosed for the edification of Mr. G. Eliot Davis, the fly-leaf of the volume he carried. A short ex-

clamation of surprise and incredulity escaped the lips of that young gentleman, which Mr. Dodson did not pause to elucidate.

As the thin, tall, melancholy but intellectual form of Mr. Walter Pater Walkinshaw wended its way upstairs, Mr. Dodson turned to William Jordan, Junior, with a Napoleonic air.

"Luney," he said, "you can fetch me the time book."

William Jordan, Junior, descended from his stool obediently. Mr. Dodson, with the aid of a ruler and some red ink, crossed out the name of M. Arnold Dodson from the current page of that work, and wrote thereunder, *G. Eliot Davis*, 8.30, *vice M. Arnold Dodson gone up-stairs.*

No sooner had Mr. Dodson performed this operation than Mr. W. P. Walkinshaw returned to that sphere over which he presided with so much distinction, and said in his kind but cultivated voice, "Mr. Dodson, Mr. Octavius will be glad if you will go up and see him."

"I will, sir," said Mr. Dodson in a tone which, subdued as it was, resounded through the counting-house.

As for the second time within a very short period Mr. Dodson took his meritorious way up the familiar stairs to Mount Olympus, he knocked again on the door of Mr. G. Eliot Davis.

"Mr. Davis," said Mr. Dodson, thrusting in his head, "prepare to receive cavalry."

Before Mr. Davis could demand the meaning of

this enigmatic injunction, Mr. Dodson had entered the august presence yet again.

Mr. Octavius Crumpett was seated *in pontificalibus* with the glass in his benign right eye, and the tips of his white and beautifully-kept hands pressed together.

"Mr. Dodson," said Mr. Octavius Crumpett, "I learn from Mr. Walkinshaw that during the four years you have been associated with this house, your conduct has been exemplary in the highest degree. I learn that your attainments are entirely worthy of the — ah, traditions of this house. It gives me more pleasure, Mr. Dodson, than I can express to ask you to accept an increase of honorarium from £90 per annum, which I understand you enjoy at present, to the sum of £200 per annum, which will date from to-day. Further, it is my intention to ask you to take up your duties to-morrow morning in the next room, which at present is in the occupation of Mr. Davis. I think I may say that I concur entirely with Mr. Walkinshaw in the opinion to which he has given recent expression, that your considerable natural talent marks you out for a higher destiny than that which you enjoy at present. I shall be obliged, Mr. Dodson, if you will ask Mr. Davis to come here."

"Mr. Davis," said Mr. Dodson, projecting a somewhat sinister countenance into the ante-room, whose accomplished occupant was studying the *Sporting Times*, "Mr. Octavius will be obliged if you will have the condescension to go next door."

XXIII

As the weeks passed it was as if by a miracle that the young William Jordan found himself still deriving pieces of silver from his mysterious association with the counting-house of Messrs. Crumpett and Hawker. Yet for some occult reason the impending sword never fell. Perhaps it was that after a while he learned to assimilate his painful and slow-wrung experience; at least in the process of time his growth of knowledge in the practical sciences intervened to save him from some of the dire pitfalls to which he was exposed.

Twelve months went by, twelve months fraught for the boy with infinite vicissitude, but he still retained the occupation of the stool at No. 24 Trafalgar Square. There could be no doubt that he owed much to the early supervision and the sagacious counsel, diversified on occasion by the eminent practice, of Mr. James Dodson. Even after the elevation of that accomplished worldling and philosopher to a higher sphere of influence, he retained an almost paternal interest in his humble pupil. It is true that the association of William Jordan, Junior, with one of Mr. Dodson's calibre was apt on occasion to diminish the number of pieces of silver which he was able to dedicate to the cause that was never out of his thoughts.

But on the other hand, there can be no doubt that William Jordan, Junior, gained a first-hand acquaintance with the practical sciences that he could never have hoped otherwise to obtain.

At the end of his first year of servitude his pieces of silver were augmented to the number of fifteen shillings per week. When he first carried home this increase to his father in the little room, he was no longer delirious with joy as was the case a year ago.

He spread them out on the table after supper with a curious melancholy. During the few months previous to this event, his chief characteristic, his eager, almost infantile, simplicity, had become tinged with a quietude which seemed to be a foreshadowing of a sombre ripening to maturity. He had been strangely silent and thoughtful of late. He had given up in a great measure, even on Sundays those thrice blessed days, his habit of reading constantly in the ancient authors.

"My father," he said, as he arranged the pieces of silver upon the table, "it is hard to believe that the same heart propels these fingers that first laid these pieces of silver upon this table before you, a long, long year ago. I think that year must have been an age, an epoch. Or is it that during that time, my father, I have been reading over-much in the Book of the Ages?"

"Ah, my beloved Achilles," said his father, "may it not be that your existence is entering upon a new phase. You know that the mortal life of heroes has

three phases. May not this be the second phase upon which you are now entering?"

"Yes, my father," said the young man thoughtfully, "I believe that to be true. Things are not so mysterious to me as they once were. During the past year I seem to have won knowledge that is great and strange and rare."

XXIV

"LUNEY, my son," said Mr. James Dodson in one of his moments of expansiveness, as they walked together one evening down the Strand, "there are only two rules to remember for this life, whatever there may be for the next. The first is to know what you want; the second is to see that you get it."

"Have you yet discovered that which is necessary to yourself?" his companion ventured to inquire.

"I have, my son," said Mr. Dodson. "I have discovered that it is necessary to myself to marry a little money. You see, my son, I have come to an understanding with Chrissie. And between you and me and the lamp-post, my son, I might go a deal farther and fare a good deal worse. She knows her way about the earth, does Chrissie; she knows what two and two make; she wasn't born yesterday. She has an eye to the main chance, has Chrissie; and that's the wife for me. She has nearly a hundred quid laid by, and her mother's brother has a beer off-license in the Borough. Literature is all right, Luney, and so is Art, and so is Law, and so is the Army, and so is the Church, but give me Trade, my son, vulgar and sordid Trade. I am about tired of

Culture, my son; I am about tired of the Office Manner. I was only thinking this afternoon what I would pay down in hard cash to be able to cut the throat of Octavius with a blunt razor a bit jagged at the edges."

It was to be divined from the expression of this somewhat unchristian desire, that even the eminent philosopher and man of the world from whose lips it proceeded was approaching a crisis in his own mental history. Yet it was hard to believe that one whose attitude towards life was of a calm and all-seeing unconcern, could also be entering upon his phase of *sturm und drang*.

Within a few days of being honored by these confidences, William Jordan, Junior, received a letter at 43 Milton Street, E.C. It contained a piece of cardboard upon which was written, *Police Sergeant and Mrs. Dodson At Home, 21 February. 8 Gladstone Villas, Midlothian Road, Peckham, S.E. Music and Progressive Games. 7.30. R.S.V.P.*

This mysterious communication proved a source of great bewilderment to its recipient, who for the first time during the twenty years that comprised his terrestrial history, found himself approaching the magic portals of social life. During the luncheon hour of the morning after the arrival of this mandate, Mr. James Dodson, who had anticipated his perplexity, was fain to enlighten it.

"You've got to turn up, you know," said that gentleman. "We are having a party of sorts to

introduce Chrissie to a few old pals. You've got to turn up, my son; we can't do without you. It won't be large, but it will be select. There will be you and me and Joe Cox, who plays for Surrey Second Eleven; and we are expecting John Dobbs, who plays the third fiddle in the orchestra at the Alcazar Theatre — that is if he can get a night off; if not, he will come on after the show — and then there will be Chrissie, and her cousin Hermione Leigh, who is a stunner and no mistake. She is engaged for the new ballet at the Alcazar. Then there will be one or two quiet unassuming people who don't much matter. It doesn't do, my son, to have a party that is all celebrities, any more than it does to have a pudding that is all plums. I have half a mind to ask young Davis, just to show that I bear him no ill-will for being so tricky — his manner is a good deal above the average, and he's a bit of a vocalist — but he knows it, like the cocky young swine that he is, and there's no saying that he mightn't get uppish and put on side with the pater and mater. No, Luney, I don't think it would be safe to risk it. Oh, and then there will be my old Aunt Tabitha, my guvnor's sister. The old girl is a corker, and no mistake. She was lady's-maid for years to the Dowager Lady Brigintop. She's seen a bit of life, I can tell you. It will make your hair curl to hear what she has got to say about the British Aristocracy. I tell you, Luney, this is going to be no mean affair. Evening clothes, of course."

The enumeration of the ingredients which were to make up the evening party to which William Jordan, Junior, had been bidden, and from whom no refusal would be taken, filled him with consternation, surprise, and dismay. Such an undertaking was so far outside his *milieu*, that for the time being, a journey to the moon or a distant planet seemed a light thing by comparison.

Yet at first, he had not the courage to damp the ardor of his friend, Mr. Dodson, by explicitly stating that he had no wish to be present. That innate courtesy, which the rebuffs to which he was subjected hourly in the stern school of experience, did nothing to lessen, nor a steadily ripening judgment to minimize, forbade the unhappy young man from exposing his craven's fears to his mentor. All the same, the problem of how to escape from so dread an ordeal without wounding the feelings of his friend, was never absent from his thoughts.

"I — I am afraid, Jimmy," he plucked up the courage to confess on the evening of the following day, "I — I cannot come to your p-p-party."

"You have got to come to my p-p-party, my son," said Jimmy Dodson, with an amused absence of compromise. "I can take no refusal."

"Oh, n-n-n-no!" said the young man in blank despair.

"Oh, y-y-y-yes! you old lunatic," said his mentor indulgently. "They all know you are coming, and you don't know how keen they are to meet you.

When I told Joe Cox you could speak Greek like a native, you should have seen his face."

"Oh, b-b-but," said the young man desperately, "I — I — I am not what you call — I — I am not what you call 'up' in these things!"

"Up, be blowed!" said Mr. Dodson. "You have got to develop your social instinct a bit. You old lunatic, what have you got to be so serious about? Haven't you ever been to a party before?"

"Oh, n-n-no," said William Jordan, Junior, with a scared face.

"Then it is time you broke the ice," said his mentor sternly. "Every chap has got to go out into society. You can't get on in the world without you do."

"Oh, n-n-n-no," protested the young man feebly.

"It will be good for you, my son," said his inexorable mentor; "do you a power of good. You want bringing out badly. You are a regular D'Orsay to what you were; when I knew you first, I never met your equal for greenness. Of course you are not very bright now; but if you only form the habit of going out into society a bit, you are quite likely to walk away from one or two of the more fancied performers who are making the running at present. The other day when I told young Davis that you could speak Greek like a native, he as good as called me a liar. I'll tell you what it is, my son; if only you could be got to think a bit more of yourself; if only you would cultivate the habit of putting on a rea-

sonable amount of side; if only you would pull up your socks a bit, you might easily, in your small way, make a bit of a mark. Of course you will never be Number One in anything; you will never see your name in large type; you'll never be a James Dodson, my son, if you live to be as old as Methuselah, for the very good reason that you haven't got it in you. But my advice to you is, form the habit of going out into society and see what it will do for you. I'll guarantee that in one year your old aunt at Hither Green won't know her own nephew."

William Jordan, Junior, however, was not to be shorn of his terrors by words so suave as these. Yet Mr. James Dodson had quite made up his mind that the party to be given in honor of his *fiancée* should not be balked of its chief lion, whose surprising attainment in a dead language Mr. Dodson had published abroad to an equally surprising extent.

However, as the young man continued to persist in his unreasonable attempts to evade his responsibilities, a ray of meaning suddenly suffused the already sufficiently bright intelligence of Mr. James Dodson.

"Of course, my son, I see, I see!" he exclaimed; "if you have never been to a party before, you are wondering about your kit. I think I know you well enough by now, old boy, to ask whether you have got an evening suit?"

Mr. Jordan was fain to confess that although he was not thinking about an evening suit — whatever

such an article of attire might be — he did not think he had got an evening suit.

"Own up, if you haven't," said Mr. Dodson. "It is nothing to be ashamed of. Some chaps might think so, but I am not the least bit snobbish myself. Own up and I shall not think the worse of you."

Upon this encouraging assurance the young man inquired if there was any substantial difference between an evening suit and an ordinary night-gown in which one went to bed.

When in all good faith the young man sought this information, he and his mentor chanced to be passing the brilliantly-illumined window of a Fleet Street tailor. Mr. James Dodson stopped abruptly. With great earnestness he peered into his companion's wan and troubled countenance. For the first time in their intercourse the bona fides of William Jordan, Junior, was seriously called in question.

"If I thought you were trying it on with me, Luney, my son," said Mr. Dodson, with that truculence which he always seemed to hold in reserve for instant use; "if I thought you were pulling my leg, I should hit you as hard as I used to before I knew you spoke Greek. But no, Luney," Mr. Dodson added, with a sigh of relief, as he continued to peer into that strange and pale countenance, "you haven't got it about you to try it on with *me*."

In an admirably practical fashion Mr. James Dodson proceeded there and then to demonstrate what

an evening suit really was by pointing out that article of attire as displayed on a dummy in the tailor's window.

"There you are, my son, there it is, all complete with a white tie and patent leather shoes," he said, indicating this mirror of fashion and mold of form.

William Jordan, Junior, confessed without shame or confusion that he had neither an evening suit, nor a white tie, nor a pair of patent leather shoes in his possession.

"If such is really the case," said Mr. Dodson, "your up-bringing has been disgracefully neglected. I don't know what your people can have been about; but it can be remedied. My young cousin Harry is about your size, although he is a good deal fatter; I shall get him to lend you his. Fortunately he has not been asked to the party; he is only a junior clerk in the insurance, and I thought he could be kept until the eleventh hour in case any of the swells dropped out. I expect he will be only too proud to lend you his suit, although you will have to get a couple of tucks put in the waistcoat and trousers."

The next day, however, Mr. Dodson had to confess that as far as his cousin Harry was concerned his expectations were disappointed.

"The confounded youth has arranged to go to a subscription ball on the same night," said Mr. Dodson, with an aggrieved air. "Like his cheek when he knew that I was having a party. I don't know

what we shall do now, my son. We might have tried young Davis, only unfortunately in a weak moment I have asked him to come to the party."

After a brief period of contemplation, in which Mr. Dodson thoughtfully reviewed the situation from every point of view, he said, "I am afraid, my son, there is only one thing to be done. You will have to get an evening suit of your own. It will be money well invested if you take to going out into society a great deal."

That evening Mr. William Jordan received an introduction to the gentleman who had the felicity of providing Mr. Dodson with his own immaculate outfit.

"Something neat, you know, Mr. Mosenthal, but not gaudy," said Mr. Dodson, as this artist approached his subject in his shirt sleeves, with a piece of chalk in his mouth and a tape measure in his long slender fingers. "You have got a difficult subject, Mr. Mosenthal, but with a bit of tact I expect you will be able to turn him out a gentleman."

Mr. Mosenthal assured Mr. Dodson very earnestly that he had not the least doubt on that score. Armed with this assurance Mr. Dodson accompanied William Jordan into the shop of the haberdasher next door for the purpose of buying him a white evening tie.

"If you were left to yourself, my son, I would bet a penny," said Mr. Dodson, "that you would buy one of those ties that are tied already; and if

you did, my son, I don't mind telling you that socially you would do for yourself at once."

Having by the exercise of this highly commendable foresight delivered William Jordan, Junior, from the toils of this imminent and deadly peril, Mr. Dodson fortified this social neophyte with further sound advice in regard to his deportment on the devious and narrow path he was about to tread, and finally committed him to the care of his green 'bus in Ludgate Circus.

"It is a dangerous experiment," mused Mr. Dodson, as the 'bus was lost amid the traffic; "but that young fellow wants bringing out badly. It will do him no end of good. But how it comes about that he can read Greek like a native beats me entirely."

As the fateful twenty-first of February drew near, William Jordan's agitation became so great that he would lie sleepless at night, imagining the ordeal that lay before him in the multiform shapes of a nightmare. During the last few months he had gained so much knowledge and hard-won experience that he was no longer so susceptible to the terrors which had seemed to render his childhood one long and intricate tissue of horrors. He had begun to understand that the hordes of "street-persons" were his fellow creatures. He had gained an insight into their ways, their speech, and even to some extent into their modes of thought. Such knowledge had rendered an incomparable service to his sense of security. He

was even gaining a measure of self-confidence. He could even frame whole sentences of their language on the spur of the moment, and utter them in such a fashion that they were intelligible to those with whom he had to consort.

Yet his anticipation that he would be cast among a number of strange people in a strange place, all of whom would be engaged upon a business in which he also would have to engage without in the least comprehending its nature, re-summoned a good deal of his former state of mind. It was clear from his friend's attitude towards it, that "a party" was an affair of some peculiar and special significance. He divined from his friend's manner that this was something far removed from the routine of tying brown paper parcels with double knots of string, pasting labels upon them, and dabbing them with splotches of colored wax. No, the duties that would be exacted of him were evidently far other than these, in which he felt he had already attained to some measure of proficiency.

It was not until the eve of the dread ordeal, when the tailor delivered his mysterious parcel to 43, Milton Street, E.C., that he took the white-haired man, his father, into his confidence. Then it was that, worn out with a distress that he knew to be contemptible, he asked that guide and comforter to whom he was wont to repair in all emergencies, whose wisdom was never at fault, whether he could escape from his ordeal with his own honor inviolate and without giving

pain to one among the street-persons to whom he owed a debt of gratitude and towards whom he already felt himself to be linked in a curious bond of affection.

The white-haired man, his father, did not repress a faint smile, which, however, was melancholy.

"Thou wilt cease to be Achilles, beloved one," said his father, "unless trial is constantly made of thy quality. Thou canst retain thy nobility only at the point of the sword. Wert thou not Achilles I would say to thee, shun all such ordeals as these. Being Achilles I would say to thee, follow in the steps of thy guide wheresoever they may lead thee through the many and devious purlieus of the out-of-doors world."

"Thy wisdom sustains me, my father," said the young man. "It searches my veins and exercises the coldness of my faint spirit almost like the living breath of the great book itself. I would beseech thee, my father, to reveal to me a passage that is proper to my pass."

The young man took down the mighty tome from the shelf, and the aged man his father opened it at a page worn thin by the intercourse of many generations. After the young man had perused it in deep silence for a little while, he knelt for many hours with his scarred forehead bent upon the faded vellum.

XXV

During the next day, which was so big with fate, Mr. William Jordan, Junior, was the recipient of further instruction from his mentor for his guidance at the forthcoming ceremonial.

"Mind you don't tuck your napkin into your collar," said this authority in the ways of the polite world; "and don't eat your cheese with your knife; and don't drink out of the finger bowls. And mind you turn up without a speck of dirt on your shoes. I should recommend you to take a 'bus to St. Paul's Station; and you had better arrange with young Davis, who will be on the train, to split a hansom from Peckham Station to Midlothian Avenue."

By the intervention of this practical mind, which, of course, by this time wielded a considerable influence in high places, both G. Eliot Davis and William Jordan, Junior, were allowed to relinquish their official duties at six p.m. in order to prepare for the festivities of the night.

As William Jordan, Junior, tied up the last parcel and stepped down from his high stool immediately prior to stealing home to array himself in fear and trembling and a brand new evening suit for the dread ordeal that awaited him, he heard, for the

twentieth time that day, the voice of his mentor in his ear.

"By the way, Luney, my son," it said, "I forgot to tell you to wear a white muffler in the train to keep the smuts off your shirt front."

With this final injunction in his ears, Mr. William Jordan, Junior, took his fearful way to 43, Milton Street, E.C., while Mr. James Dodson looked round into the annex of the Brontë Hotel to inquire of his *fiancée* for the third time that day, "what sort of fettle she was in?"

It is not the business of this biography to estimate the precise quantity of blood and tears that it cost William Jordan, Junior, to clothe himself in his evening suit and to embellish the same with a necktie which had to be arranged by his own very inefficient fingers, and also with a pair of new and excruciatingly tight shoes. It must suffice to say that when at last, in a state bordering on mental derangement, he had by some means contrived to array himself in these articles of civilized attire, to reap as the immediate reward of a somewhat frantic perseverance a measure of sheer physical discomfort that he had never before experienced, he utilized the few minutes that remained to him before he obeyed the decree that sent him forth to Midlothian Avenue, Peckham, S.E., upon his knees in the little room by the side of the white-haired man his father.

XXVI

Upon the wind-swept platform of St. Paul's Station in the City, while awaiting the arrival of the 7.7 to Peckham, he was accosted by the erect and immaculate form of Mr. G. Eliot Davis. The nonchalance of bearing and air of supreme self-possession of this gentleman were hardly inferior to those of Mr. Dodson himself .

"Hullo, Luney," said Mr. Davis, looking up from the precincts of an inordinately high collar to the face of a gaunt figure which, somewhat to the annoyance of Mr. Davis, was considerably taller than his own; "arrayed, I see, like Solomon in all his glory. Feeling pretty cheery, eh, and full of parlor tricks? I must say these functions don't amuse me at all. Music and progressive games! — I like more knife and fork work myself. Come on and have a sherry and bitters before we start."

Mr. William Jordan had already acquired that rudimentary wisdom of the "out-of-doors" world, that "when you are in Rome you must do like the Romans." He had also on his way in the omnibus determined to follow out this fundamental truth, as far as in him lay, to the letter. Therefore, with great docility he accompanied Mr. Davis to the buffet to have a sherry and bitters. It is not necessary to

state that even in the act of swallowing that mysterious compound he had ample cause to rue his superhuman resolve.

It was with a sensation of being poisoned that in the wake of his mentor for the time being he invaded a second-class smoking compartment, already overcrowded with emphatic street-persons, smoking equally emphatic tobacco.

Upon their arrival at Peckham, the young man recalled Mr. Dodson's injunctions and very timorously advanced the suggestion that they should take a hansom to Midlothian Avenue. Mr. Davis received the suggestion with loud-voiced derision.

"Not likely," said that gentleman. "I am not a bloated plutocrat. You should have sported a pair of goloshes the same as me."

William Jordan, Junior, was confronted accordingly with the extreme case of having to take a hansom for himself, and of inviting Mr. Davis to accept a seat therein. Mr. Davis's tone of unmistakable rebuff, however, had quelled him so effectually that he could not find the courage to do either of these things. Accordingly he was obliged to pick his way with great trepidation along divers unclean thoroughfares to the frank amusement of his companion, who, in bringing to his notice innumerable pools of water and stretches of mud upon the route, adjured him earnestly "to be careful of his 'pumps.'"

Upon the stroke of half-past eight Mr. Davis executed an ostentatious tattoo upon the knocker of No.

8, Gladstone Villas, which was situate amid two narrow rows of ill-lighted, meagre, lower middle class respectability. They were received with great cordiality by Mr. Dodson himself, who in immaculate evening attire appeared to considerable advantage.

"Hullo, Luney, old boy," said Mr. Dodson, "so here we are! Give me your hat and coat and then come in here, and I'll introduce you to Coxey and John Dobbs."

With a dull terror in his soul Mr. William Jordan, Junior, resigned himself implicitly into the care of his mentor, so that almost without being aware of how he came there, he found himself in an exceedingly small room in the presence of several other immaculately attired gentlemen; and these, although entire strangers to him, were of an extremely critical cast of countenance. He could understand nothing of what was taking place, although presently he awoke to the fact that these gentlemen were grasping him by the hand.

"You'll have a finger before we go up-stairs to the ladies?" said Mr. Dodson, pouring a colored liquid into a tumbler, to which he added an even more mysterious liquid that went off with a hiss. "Say when."

"Oh n-n-n-no, please!" gasped Mr. William Jordan; for a bitter recollection still abided within him of his misadventure at the railway station buffet.

Hearing this note of somewhat exaggerated appeal the other gentlemen could hardly repress a guffaw,

particularly when incited thereto by a knowing wink from Mr. Davis.

"Never mind them, Luney old boy," said Mr. Dodson, who as he spoke smiled archly at his guests. "They don't know any better. They are not accustomed to mix with men of intellect on equal terms."

"That is the truest word you've spoken this week, Jim Dodson," said Mr. John Dobbs of the Alcazar Theatre, a heavy and sombre young man with very long and thick black hair and a voice that seemed to proceed from his boots.

"Close it, Jimmy," said Mr. Joseph Cox, a small and dapper young gentleman with a very easy and cordial manner.

"One of these days he will be the best slow left-arm bowler in Surrey," said Mr. Dodson in an impressive aside to Mr. William Jordan, and in a voice sufficiently audible for Mr. Joseph Cox to hear.

Mr. Dodson, having to the frank amusement of those gentlemen assembled, exercised his blandishments in vain to induce Mr. William Jordan "to have a finger before going up-stairs to see the ladies," at length proceeded to conduct the young man thither without this aid, which he and his friends deemed most essential to the accomplishment of so grave an ordeal.

"Don't be nervous, old boy," said his mentor kindly, as he took him firmly by the arm; "at the worst they can't do more than eat you, and if they do they will wish they hadn't."

"Are — are my — my sh-shoes all right?" stammered Mr. William Jordan in a hoarse whisper.

"Right as rain, my son," said his mentor. "And Mosenthal has turned you a treat. You look a regular poem in blank verse. It wouldn't surprise me a bit if they *do* want to eat you."

As Mr. Dodson placed his hand on the drawing-room door the terrible sensations of that long year ago when the same hand was on the door of Mr. Octavius Crumpett again assailed the young man. Only to-night these emotions seemed to be more intense. And of late he had come fondly to imagine that never again would he become the prey of weaknesses so pitiful.

His brain was dazed and his eyes were almost dark when bright lights and colors and a pageant of female loveliness was first unfolded to his gaze. It is true that the first of these ladies whom he had to encounter was not very beautiful: a fat, elderly, unemphatic kind of lady whose clothes looked odd, and who wore a kind of irrelevant dignity which somehow did not seem to fit her.

"Mater, this is Mr. William Jordan, the young sportsman I am always telling you about," said Mr. Dodson in a cheery voice.

"Pleased to meet you, young man," said this lady, shooting out a fat hand as a highwayman might shoot out a horse-pistol. However, Mr. Jordan had the presence of mind to grasp it, and at the same time to bow low.

Beside her was a lady dressed severely in black. She sat very upright, and held a pair of glasses in front of her which she used with devastating effect. In mien she was aged and severe; in manner she was sharp and staccato, and with no more geniality than a piece of ice.

"Aunt Tabitha," said Mr. Dodson, "Mr. Jordan. Mr. Jordan — Aunt Tabitha."

This very formidable lady turned such a cold and resolute gaze upon the young man that sharp little shivers seemed to envelop him. It seemed to congeal the half-formed words on his lips. All the same he was able to go through the formality of almost bowing to the ground.

The next lady to whom his attention was directed was extremely resplendent and also extremely *decolletée*. In spite of her air of magnificence, her blazing jewels, the gorgeous texture of her skin and her clothes, there seemed to be something curiously familiar about her. The mystery was solved, however, almost before it had had time to become one.

"Chrissie," said Mr. Dodson, "what price our fat friend?"

"Ain't he just utter," said the gorgeous creature, giving Mr. Jordan a playful flick with her fan. "I am sure mother ought to be proud of her boy tonight."

As Mr. Jordan bowed very low before her, the gorgeous lady made a very remarkable and visibly dis-

torted "face" at another gorgeous lady who sat by her side.

In sheer splendor and profuse magnificence all paled their ineffectual fires before that of this fourth lady who sat by Chrissie's side. When the young man first ventured to look at this apparition of female loveliness, the power of breathing was almost denied to him. In beauty she was ravishing; divinely tall apparently, and most divinely fair. She had the look of a goddess; young, brilliant, queenly, with a noble fire in her glance. Her clothes in their ample majesty and her jewels in their lustre made those of Chrissie appear almost tawdry by comparison. Never until that moment had William Jordan divined, not even in that remote and ill-starred adventure of his childhood, that actual authentic goddesses still walked the earth, clad in their ravishing flesh and blood. As this vision burst upon his gaze William Jordan could scarcely repress an exclamation of awe and wonder and delight.

"Miss Hermione Leigh," said Mr. Dodson, "Mr. Jordan; Mr. Jordan — Miss Hermione Leigh."

To the exaggerated deference of which she was the recipient on the part of Mr. William Jordan, this divinity returned a curt and aloof nod, which might hardly have been interpreted as a nod at all; and at the same moment she made a gesture to Chrissie which partook of the nature of putting out her tongue.

"Ain't he marvelous?" said Miss Hermione Leigh

to her friend Chrissie in an eloquent aside. "Where did Jimmy dig *him* up? Has he taken out a license for him?"

"A gilt mug," said Chrissie in the matter-of-fact tone that never forsook her.

"Oh, oh!" said Miss Hermione Leigh, as if sudden light had suffused her robust intelligence; "that explains it." She turned an arch glance upon Mr. William Jordan. "Not going to run away, cocky, are you?" said the divinity. "Ought to be room for you and me on the same settee."

She patted the sofa on which she sat with a white-gloved paw.

Mr. Jordan felt his ears to be burning. A fiery haze was floating before his eyes. He was trembling in every limb. With a supreme effort he managed to take a seat on the sofa, and as close to the goddess as he dared.

Three minutes of tense silence passed. Both ladies appeared to expect him to say something. Of this fact, however, Mr. William Jordan was not at all conscious. His excitement, his nervousness, his self-conscious effacement had yielded place to a kind of religious awe. He, William Jordan, was slowly beginning to realize that unawares he had had the unspeakable temerity to enter the presence of the white-armed Hera. As far as he was concerned, the occasion was not one for speech, even had he been in a physical condition to indulge in such an act of vandalism. He had quite enough to do to glance

at her furtively, sideways, and to try to catch the sound of her breath.

At last the goddess looked at him very boldly and directly, right into his shy and bewildered eyes that were set so deep.

"Well?" she said.

By a wonderful effort of the mind, which was yet purely involuntarily, and was only rendered possible by his almost occult faculty of a never-failing courtesy, the young man grasped the fact that the goddess was under the impression that he had dared to address a remark to her.

"I — I b-beg your p-p-p-pardon," he stammered painfully. "I — I d-don't think I — I s-said a-anything."

These words and particularly the mode of their utterance caused the goddess to titter in a very audible and unmistakable manner. Her companion followed her example.

"He d-doesn't t-think he s-said a-anything," said one lady to the other, "he d-doesn't t-think he s-said a-anything."

Miss Hermione Leigh then turned to Mr. William Jordan.

"You *are* funny," she said.

Before Mr. Jordan could find a fitting rejoinder to an indictment which seemed to baffle him completely, his friend Mr. Davis sauntered up to the sofa. His hands were in his pockets; his demeanor was one of inimitable nonchalance.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Chrissie, "look what's blown in! How's Percival?"

"So, so," said Mr. Davis, with an air of polite weariness.

"I spose you know Hermione?"

"Only on Saturdays," said Mr. Davis, with a humility that seemed to be finely considered, "when I draw my screw."

"Oh come, Percy," said Miss Hermione Leigh, with amiable protest, "I reckon to know you at least two days a week since you have had a rise in your salary."

"Not you," said Mr. Davis, with quiet good nature. "One supper at the Troc of a Saturday with a half-bottle of Pommery, and it is all blewed bar the washing money. You know very well, Hermione, you cut mugs like me dead when we come sneaking out of Lockhart's all the rest of the week."

"Not quite so much of the mug, Percy," said Miss Hermione Leigh, "and not quite so much of the Pommery. You don't average three bottles a year."

Before Mr. Davis could deny this impeachment in adequate terms, the voice of Mr. Dodson was heard proclaiming from the piano at the other end of the room that Mr. Percival Davis, the celebrated tenor, would sing the no-less celebrated song, "I'll sing thee songs of Araby."

"I will do so," said Mr. Davis, with great promptitude. "This is where I get my own back."

Mr. Davis rendered that song in a quite admirable

manner. When the deserved applause which greeted it had subsided, and Mr. Dodson had informed the company that owing to the unparalleled length of the program, and the unprecedented quantity of talent that was present that evening, no encores would be granted in any circumstances whatever, Miss Hermione Leigh informed her companion that "although Percy was dirt mean, he *could* sing," a judgment to which Chrissie accorded her imprimatur.

Mr. Dodson then announced that Mr. John Dobbs of the Alcazar Theatre, and of the London and Provincial Concerts, would render that heart-rending melody, "The Lost Chord," which Mr. Dobbs immediately proceeded to do. As this melancholy-looking and large-eyed and profuse-haired young man drew marvelous strains from two pieces of wood and a few strings Mr. William Jordan's thoughts strayed a moment from the thrall of the goddess. He sat with his hands clasped, his gaunt form as tense as an arrow drawn to the string. In his eyes was a dreamy rapture, and in the centre of each was a large stealthy tear. His whole being was entranced. The two ladies in whose vicinity he was, nudged one another furtively and together perused that strange countenance with great satisfaction to themselves.

Upon the subsidence of the enthusiasm which Mr. John Dobb's efforts called forth, Mr. Dodson announced that Miss Hermione Leigh of the "Peace and War Ballet" of the Alcazar Theatre, would render that touching melody, "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay,"

with dance accompaniment, as performed by her before most of the bald-heads of Europe, not to mention those of Bethnal Green. This announcement was received with such favor by the gentlemen present that immediately they broke into a cheer.

With immense good nature Miss Hermione Leigh swept across the room to the piano, and with the aid of the variously accomplished Mr. Dodson himself, who "scratched the ivories" by request, and also with the aid of Mr. Davis, who turned over the music after, as he expressed it, "he had cleared the course for the big race" by driving back the company, regardless of age and sex, from within an area of at least eight feet of the piano, and in spite of the fact that Aunt Tabitha, who was compelled to move her chair, stared at Mr. Davis through her glasses with a stony glare, and said at the top of a loud harsh voice, "That is a very unmannerly young man"— a remark which set the remainder of the company in roars of laughter, in which Mr. Davis joined more loudly than anybody else.

Yet what can describe or even remotely indicate the emotions which surged over Mr. William Jordan, Junior, when through eyes dim with ecstasy he beheld the divine form of the goddess, who, as she rose to her full height beside the piano and broke into a not particularly melodious warble, approximated more nearly in physique and appearance to his Olympians than any creature he had looked upon hitherto. It did not matter to William Jordan what strange and

fantastic words fell from that full, white throat, or what fantastic gyrations that divine form subsequently went through; it was not for such as himself remotely to comprehend the speech and gestures of those immortal ones of whom she was a daughter. He sat entranced, unable to move, to think, or even to realize the wild emotions of which so suddenly he had become the prey.

When the goddess, a little out of breath, and also flushed, and therefore looking more brilliant than ever, swept back to the sofa to his side, a kind of religious awe mounted in Mr. William Jordan as he peered upwards into that beautiful, smiling, good-natured face.

"O-o-oh!" he exclaimed softly.

Hearing the exclamation, both Chrissie and the goddess looked towards the source of it in unconcealed amazement. They then looked at one another. As the goddess sank upon the sofa somewhat heavily she broke out into a loud laugh.

"Too funny!" she said, and proceeded to fan herself with great vigor.

Mr. Dodson then informed the company that Mr. James Dodson, of the St. James's Restaurant Bar, Piccadilly, would admit any member of the audience into the mysteries of the three-card trick free of charge, yet made an exception in favor of Mr. Percival Davis, who was not in need of instruction.

"Jimmy," said his *fiancée* in an authoritative tone, "sing *I Want One like Pa had Yesterday.*"

When Mr. Dodson had rendered this ballad with immense success, he called upon Joseph Cox, Esquire, of Surrey Second Eleven, and also of the leading public-houses within a mile radius of Kennington Oval, to give his world-famous imitation of a white mouse walking on its fore-paws backwards.

Mr. Joseph Cox, with great natural modesty, disclaimed any special aptitude for a feat of this delicate nature, but, rather than be a source of disappointment to the company, he would undertake either to give an imitation of a hen laying an egg, or, if preferred, he would stand on his head while any member of the audience counted thirty.

Upon the proposal by Mr. Joseph Cox of these two extremely honorable alternatives, Mr. Dodson proceeded, as he phrased it, "to put it to the meeting." With surprising unanimity "the meeting" decided that Mr. Cox be called upon to attempt the hazardous feat of standing on his head while Miss Tabitha Dodson counted thirty. After a little delay, which was caused by Miss Tabitha Dodson declining in most uncompromising terms to be associated in an official capacity with "such a piece of tomfoolery"— which resulted in the hostess, Mrs. Dodson, being nominated for this onerous duty — Mr. Joseph Cox, with a solemnity of mien which filled the audience with the greatest possible delight, proceeded to poise himself upon his apex.

When the enthusiasm which this feat excited had subsided in some measure, it was restored almost to

its original fervor by Mr. Dodson's announcement of the event of the evening. Mr. William Jordan, the distinguished scholar and England's future poet laureate, would recite the first book of Homer's Odyssey in the original Greek.

When Mr. William Jordan discovered that he was the source of some almost hilarious enthusiasm, he cried in tragic accents, with a kind of horror in his deep-set eyes, "Oh n-n-n-no, I c-c-c-c-couldn't! indeed I c-c-c-c-couldn't!"

In the midst of the shrieks of laughter which his words and the distraught expression of his countenance provoked, and after Mr. Dodson had ministered thereto by the assurance "that it was not because Mr. Jordan couldn't, but because Mr. Jordan wouldn't," he allayed any feeling of disappointment that might have arisen from Mr. Jordan's obduracy — which he assured Mr. Jordan "was not the thing" — by proposing that they should go down to supper.

It was in the process of marshaling this "small but select" assembly that Mr. Dodson found a further opportunity for the display of that administrative power of which he was the fortunate possessor. At least three of the gentlemen present were aspirants for the favors of Miss Hermione Leigh. However, Mr. Dodson, who even upon the threshold of his career had nothing to learn in the elements of social practice, chose to assume a demeanor of impregnable innocence towards all the covert signals that were directed to him, and informed Mr. William Jordan

that his was the honor of "taking down" the divinity who reclined by his side.

It must be admitted that Miss Hermione Leigh accepted this ruling somewhat ungraciously.

"I shall ask Jimmy what he means by this," said the goddess to Chrissie. "He might at least have taken that stuffed owl out of the glass case on the chimney-piece, so that I could go down with that."

"It is only his fun," said Chrissie.

"I sha'n't sing after supper," said Miss Hermione Leigh, bridling.

"You have not been asked, my dear," said Chrissie imperturbably.

"Anyhow, that cuckoo is better than Percy Davis," said Mr. Joseph Cox to Mr. John Dobbs, with the resignation of one who has swallowed most of the formulas.

"Better that crackpot than Joe Cox," Mr. John Dobbs confided to Mr. Percival Davis.

In the dining-room of No. 8, Gladstone Villas, which was a more commodious dwelling than any this rising family had previously occupied — a contingency that was due to the recent rise in salary of its eldest scion — was seated Police-Sergeant Dodson, in his best and very highly furbished official uniform. The lustre of his hair outshone the candelabra.

Police-Sergeant Dodson rose from his seat at the head of the highly-decorated table, which he had occupied with heroic patience for the last half-hour

while he waited for the real business of the evening to begin, and shook each person who entered heartily by the hand — beginning with "Mother" — and hoped earnestly that one and all would make themselves quite at home.

"What do *you* think, old cock?" said Mr. Dodson *fils*, placing his *fiancée* at the right hand of his hearty, yet majestic parent.

"No sparring for places," cried Mr. Dodson *fils* in a voice of large authority. "You've got to tackle the ham, Percy, my son; and Joe Cox, you set about those ducks. You ought to be used to 'em by this time."

In spite, however, of the airy and invincible good humor of Mr. Dodson *fils*, it called for no particular acuteness of observation to detect that a gloom had suddenly overspread the company. Mr. Dodson *fils* may even have been conscious of it himself; but, even if he was, his gay courage and inimitable *flair* would admit no check; and, further, it was his boast "that he had a mind above trifles." But, in spite of this, it was apparent to all that a gloom had overspread the company.

"I call it an insult to me," said Chrissie across the table to the goddess in a defiant undertone. "Jimmy will hear of this again."

"Poor form, I must say," said Mr. Davis to Miss Sparhawk, an agitated but voluble young lady who had arrived late. "I should have thought Jimmy's old man would have known better."

In spite of the indefatigable exertions of Mr. Dodson *fils*, who took upon himself the somewhat exacting duties of "head waiter," the vigorous manipulation of knives and forks, and the revivifying influence of what Mr. Dodson *fils* facetiously termed "the gooseberry"—a yellow, fizzing liquid which Mr. Jordan, with a lively recollection of a recent experience, tasted very warily, and found almost nice—in spite of all these circumstances, it was only too clear that something had passed from the gay assembly that could never return.

Mr. Jordan ate very little of the robust foods that were spread before him in such profusion; but the goddess, who so miraculously had been confided to his care, behaved before these viands with wonderful vigor, resolution and success. It was far from Mr. Jordan's province to marvel that a goddess should eat so much, or with such an absence of delicacy, but marvel he did at the catholicity of a taste that could deal so faithfully with meats of this sort, which in no sense seemed to compare with her native nectar and ambrosia.

A spasmodic flicker of gaiety was imparted to the company by the toasts and speeches. Police-Sergeant Dodson, in referring in appropriate terms to an event which concerned the scion of his house very nearly, "hoped Jimmy, who was a good boy, would make a better man than his father."

"Taken as read, old cock," interposed Mr. Dodson *fils*.

In the course of the reply made by Mr. Dodson *fils* to the toast of his own health and that of his *fiancée*, he testified with a *bonhomie* that was most engaging, and in terms of great felicity, to the pleasure derived by all present from the presence of everybody else.

By the time the feasting and toasting had been conducted to an issue that was more or less happy — in spite of the pall that still hovered over the assembly — and after the ladies had gone up-stairs, and after Mr. Jordan had been exhorted in vain by each of the gentlemen who still lingered around the board to "try a weed"— an invitation which he declined in such alarmed accents as to cause them all to become hilariously merry — the bewildered and feverishly excited young man, without knowing how he came to be there, found himself standing again in the drawing-room in the presence of the goddess.

In the process of time the fact invaded his mind that his place on the settee by the side of the divinity was now in the occupation of another. That other was Mr. Percival Davis.

"He may be very clever," Mr. Jordan overheard the penetrating accent of the goddess, "but I don't think much of his conversation. Do you?"

"I call it rotten," said Mr. Percival Davis, as he transfixed the young man with a smile that was full of meaning. "I suppose his brain is so subtle that when he says something it is just the same as though he had said nothing at all."

"Must be," said Miss Hermione Leigh.

Mr. Davis and the goddess laughed so loudly and so directly at Mr. William Jordan that he gave a little gasp of dismay and yielded a step in dire confusion.

"Run away and play," said Mr. Davis.

"Like a good boy," said the goddess.

"You are sure you got permission from mother to be out so late?" Chrissie inquired languidly from the head of the sofa.

While Mr. Jordan continued to stand in this irresolution, and in his distress at finding himself publicly mocked by others, not knowing which way to turn or what to do, he became aware that across the room, which was enveloped in a kind of red haze, the elderly and angular old lady with the glasses, the severe mien, the austere black dress, and the loud, harsh voice, appeared to be in the act of beckoning to him.

"Yes, go and sit with auntie," said Mr. Davis, as the unhappy young man, with all his liveliest fears returning, approached this old lady of most formidable aspect.

"Sit here," said the old lady, placing her hand on the vacant chair at her side.

Mr. Jordan obeyed with great docility.

"By the way, what is your name?" inquired the old lady in a much softer tone than that which she seemed habitually to use.

"My n-n-name is William Jordan, ma'am," said the young man, overawed a good deal by her de-

meanor, yet at the same time already beginning to feel much more at his ease than he had done in the presence of Chrissie and the goddess.

"Well, Mr. Jordan," said the old lady, with a subacid precision which yet did not seem unpleasant, "you are in the unhappy position this evening of being the only gentleman present."

The significance of this pregnant assertion was not at first rendered to Mr. Jordan, but the old lady, observing his bewilderment, deigned to make it clear.

"My nephew," she said, "is a very able young man, but he is far removed from being a gentleman. His friends are not able young men, and they are still further removed from being gentlemen. I call them cads, Mr. Jordan; I call them cads. And those women! I have no words for *them*. I doubt whether the Dowager Lady Brigintop would have had words for them either. It is a singular fact, Mr. Jordan, which you may have observed, though I doubt it, that in all grades of society the women are either better than the men or they are worse. But they are never on the same level. I consider it an outrage, Mr. Jordan, for a Christian gentlewoman to be asked to meet women of that type. I am sorry to say, Mr. Jordan, that my nephew is like his father, he is deficient in the finer shades of feeling. To think that my brother Charles should appear at an evening party in the uniform of a police constable! A man who is capable of such a breach of

taste is capable of anything. I would blame his wife Maria, but, unfortunately, she was ever too poor a creature to be worthy of blame in anything. Mr. Jordan, you are entitled to sincere sympathy. I cannot conceive of a harder fate than to be born a gentleman in your present rank of life."

This monologue, delivered in a sharp and stinging staccato, was so much over the head of Mr. Jordan as to be completely unintelligible.

"I speak with authority," the old lady continued in a manner that made the proclamation superfluous. "It has been my ill fortune to occupy your position for many years."

Before Mr. Jordan could comprehend what the position was that this majestic old lady had occupied for many years, she rose from her chair in a very grave and stiff manner, and said, "Mr. Jordan, you may conduct me to my omnibus."

Taking an impressive leave of Mrs. Dodson, who was a very florid and indecisive kind of lady, and of Police-Sergeant Dodson, who was a very stolid and imperturbable kind of man, the old lady left the room with a demeanor of marked hauteur, humbly followed by the abashed form of Mr. William Jordan.

"What price Luney and Aunt Tabitha," said Mr. Dodson *fils* from the seclusion of a card-table that had been set up in a corner. "I expect he will cut me out in her will, but if he does I sha'n't begrudge it him."

As Mr. Jordan conducted the majestic old lady to her omnibus, she had the condescension to inform him that there was something about him that engaged her curiosity.

"I suppose it is," she said in her ample and uncompromising manner, "that even when a Christian gentlewoman gets to be as old as I am she does not lose her taste for a gentleman. I have had to live without the sight of one for many years now. I loathe my nephew. Yet he is a young man who will make a mark in the world. You, Mr. Jordan, will make no mark in the world, but I hope I may have the pleasure of meeting you again."

It was with this odd combination of tenderness and ferocity, of clear-sightedness and sentiment, that the austere old creature, with a smile for her cavalier that was almost gentle, ensconced herself in a dark corner of the omnibus. On the way home to her lonely hearth, at No. 5 Petersfield Terrace, Brixton, she muttered, "There is no place in this world for that young man. I would like to know his history; I would like to know his history!"

Mr. Jordan finally quitted No. 8 Gladstone Villas, Midlothian Avenue, that evening a few minutes before midnight. He found himself again committed to the charge of Mr. Percival Davis. They managed to catch the last train to the City.

"Mark my words, Luney," said Mr. Davis, with a prophetic fervor, as they sat opposite one another in the train, "Jimmy has done for himself with

Chrissie. She will never forgive his governor sitting down to supper in his rozzer's kit. J. Dodson knows most things, but the weasel was sleeping that time. I think, my worthy Lunatic, this is where one P. Davis goes in again himself."

It was a feeble, weary, limping figure — for the new shoes were excruciatingly tight — that crept into the little room during the small hours of the morning. The white-haired man was conning the pages of the great book.

"Ah, my beloved Achilles," he said, "so you have found sanctuary again. I know that your adventures have been far too marvelous to relate. But would you say, beloved, that your infinite pains have borne a fruit adequate to that which they have cost you?"

"Yes, my father," said the young man humbly, "I think I may say that."

The young man's thoughts were of the goddess. As he lay in his pillows, with his dazed brain reverting for the thousand and first time to that rare and strange glamor and all that it implied, he fell into a troubled sleep that was fraught with dreams.

XXVII

On the following day, during the luncheon hour, William Jordan, Junior, was complimented upon his bearing at the party.

"I don't mind telling you, Luney," said Mr. Dodson, "that you were the best-looking chap there. Young Davis thinks he was, but if he went to the levée at Buckingham Palace he would think the same. No, Luney, you were easily first; and if you could only get that mark off your cheek you might marry money. And your behavior was quite nice. If you would only learn to hold your own a bit more, and not let chaps like young Davis come it over you, you might do very well. You would never be a shining light, you know; you haven't got it in you; but you will improve as you gain experience."

Before that day was out, however, Mr. Dodson's discourse was pitched in another key. This occurred immediately after Mr. Dodson had paid a visit to the refreshment buffet of the Brontë Hotel.

"What do you think, Luney?" said Mr. Dodson, with an air of whimsical indignation which yet had a touch of the tragic; "Chrissie has taken the hump. She says she regards it as a personal insult that my governor should have sat down to supper in

his uniform. She has broken it off. She has returned this."

"This" was a ring which Mr. Dodson exhibited with a countenance of humorous rue. His mien was at once curiously enigmatic, yet quietly comic. It seemed to imply that this true philosopher was not only resigned to fate's decree, but also, after the manner of the best practitioners, he was prepared to derive profit and instruction therefrom.

"I am in luck," he said cheerfully; "it is a good and cheap get-out. I ought to have known better, with all my experience. Yet I have got a bit more, without having to pay for it either. Women are no good to a rising man. I suppose young Davis will go in again now; I spoilt his game, you know, my son. Well, he is welcome to her as far as I am concerned. If he lands her he will have my sympathy."

Having reviewed the situation with this wholly admirable breadth, the eminent philosopher dismissed the subject from his thoughts with a calm detachment that was not the least among his gifts.

Mr. James Dodson continued to extend his patronage and kindly interest to that hopeless neophyte in the ways of the world, Mr. William Jordan, Junior. On Easter Monday he took him to Margate, "to get a whiff of the sea."

It was with indescribable sensations that the young man beheld, for the first time in his life, that free expanse, the eternal boundless theatre of wondrous

adventure and high-hearted enterprise. As upon this historic day he came down to the seashore, swept by the shrewd winds, yet bathed in the noble sunlight, and he saw the highway of the gods that was spread before him like a waving plain of green jewels, he astonished his companions by breaking forth into a curious cry of rapture.

"What a lunatic he is!" they said, "to make all this fuss over the sight of the sea."

"A bit loose in the flats," said Mr. John Dobbs, of the Alcazar Theatre.

When his companions chartered a boat, and he came to entrust himself to it, he diverted them infinitely by the lively fear he displayed. Yet, once abroad on the great green bay, his misgivings left him. He plucked off his hat, that his temples might be bare to the shrewd salt airs and the yellow-shining light of the sun, and his eyes beholding nothing but the lapping waters and the wonderful sky which had never seemed so near, he forgot for one glorious hour that he was the inhabitant of cities, that an inexorable destiny had doomed him to be a street-person all his days.

"This is the life of Odysseus!" he muttered, "this is the life of Odysseus!"

As he dabbled his hands in the water his eyes were flooded suddenly with strange, stinging, indescribable tears. His lips moved to the best remembered passages in his favorite authors. His pulses throbbed

with rebellious violence. Each of his wide-stretched senses began to exult as his eyes, his lips, his nostrils, and the dilated pores of his skin absorbed the pungent draughts of sunshine and air. Suddenly, without knowing what he did, he broke into a grotesque kind of song, which was born within him as he uttered it. The odd, thin, quavering treble rose above the lappings of the water against the sides of the boat.

"Well done, Luney, old boy," cried his companions with their loud shouts of laughter; "well done, old man."

Incited by his example, one of them produced a concertina. He proceeded to play a music-hall air. It was then that a strange incident occurred. To the profound astonishment of the others, William Jordan, who had been sitting in the prow, gazing out to sea, rose and came aft to one Benjamin Sparks, who was manipulating the concertina. Without a word he plucked that instrument out of his grasp and flung it away into the water.

Mr. Benjamin Sparks vented his incredulous anger in a volley of oaths.

"There goes five quid," he cried savagely, "I've a mind to chuck you in after it, you blighted lunatic."

Benjamin Sparks was a very powerfully-built young man, with red hair, and uncompromising manners. In anger he was known to be formidable.

One and all awaited with a lively curiosity, not unmingled with trepidation, the treatment that would be meted out to the aggressor.

"You puny, half-begotten rat!" roared Benjamin Sparks. "I've a good mind to throw you into the sea."

Yet the other occupants of the boat marveled to observe that William Jordan did not yield a step to so much power and truculence. The young man stood bareheaded, with his white face uplifted. His hands and teeth were clenched. He was deadly pale, but not a trace of excitement was in his bearing.

"We will perish together," he was heard to mutter.

Without waiting to be attacked, William Jordan uttered a cry like that of a wild animal, and flung himself headlong upon his adversary. As their clenched forms grappled to one another, and swayed from one side of the boat to the other, shouts of anguish and terror rose from their companions.

"They will have her over!" they cried wildly. "They will drown us all."

In a moment they were stricken with panic. Helpless, yet half wild with terror, they clutched the sides of the frail boat. It was by a miracle that it regained an even keel. It was also due to a further dispensation of an inscrutable providence that both combatants did not find themselves in the water.

They put back to the shore with all speed. It was

with true devoutness of spirit that they found themselves once again on dry land.

"I shall never take you on the sea again, my son," said Mr. Dodson, with a very white face.

"He ought to be ducked," was the opinion freely expressed by the others.

Mr. Benjamin Sparks took off his coat with a businesslike deliberation.

"Now then, you d——d lunatic," he said, "we will have it out."

"I — I d-don't know how to fight," stammered William Jordan, all of whose spirit had fled, "but you can throw me into the sea if you w-want to."

"If we don't get him away," said the others apprehensively, "Ben Sparks will murder him."

Whereupon Mr. James Dodson linked his arm through that of his singular companion.

"Come on, Luney," he said, "I don't want to have to give evidence before a coroner's jury. What a lunatic you are! Whatever possessed you to do it? You have quite spoilt the day for everybody. I shall never bring you to Margate again."

William Jordan and his mentor walked in dead silence in the direction of the town. But after they had gone some distance, William Jordan stopped abruptly and said, "I — I must go back to the sea. I — I cannot leave the sea. I — I will return to the railway station at a quarter past six."

"Promise me," said his mentor earnestly, "that

you will be up to no new mischief. "I don't know that you are fit to be left alone with the sea. It seems to get into your brain."

William Jordan gave this promise, and returned to the sea. For hours he walked up and down the shore, his eyes ever upon that wonderful, endless expanse. When at last he grew very weary, and his unaccustomed limbs began to fail, he offered an old fisherman some pieces of silver to row him again out to sea. Until the sun dipped behind the line of the coast, he sat at the helm of the boat drinking long and deep draughts of the free and noble life that lay all about him.

Men and cities were far from his thoughts during these enchanted hours. His mind became beautiful with fantasies and copious with ideas. As he reclined on the bosom of this great and mysterious wilderness, with the fowls of the air flapping over his head, the strange craft ever tossing from side to side, and a hungry waste all about him, capable of devouring him yet incomprehensibly refraining from so doing, his life acquired a texture which it had never had before. Even the ancient authors, with all the subtle aromas and the powerful essences their mighty imaginations had distilled through the ages, could not concentrate into their magic ink this relentless, yet elusive spaciousness which this dweller in cities now beheld.

The caged bird began again to croon its odd, wild, undeveloped melodies. Fragments of curious,

haunted, half-remembered phrases came upon his lips. The stinging tears crept again to his eyes. Through the haze of their blindness the waters were no longer to be seen. But he could hear them gurgling against the sides of the boat. There was a boom of distant breakers, the creek of oars, the voices of the four winds and of the winged inhabitants of the air.

The mists of the evening slowly overspread the wilderness. Silently, stealthily, they came unperceived. They were all part of the Idea. He did not resent their appearance when he saw them there, veiling all things with their subtle presence. He was still crooning his queer songs. Men and cities, street-persons and pieces of silver had long vanished from the pageant of his consciousness.

After awhile, with an involuntary deference to the chill of the night, he lay down on the floor of the boat on the inhospitable rough boards, which yet were as soft as feathers. His hands were clasped about his head, as if to support the delicious fantasies that were in his brain. He seemed to swoon with the rapture of his new and brave identity.

"This is the life of heroes, O Achilles!" the familiar voices of the night and the sea were constantly murmuring.

Presently he seemed to waken to the fact that he was looking upwards far into the sky. Through the soft white mists he could discern a single speck of silver gleaming frostily. Suddenly, with a cold vibration in his veins, he recalled how in his tender infancy

he had seen that particular orb shining above the shutters of the little room. In an instant the crooning song upon his lips had changed to a moan of anguish. Yet it passed immediately. Peering at the star he seemed to recognize it as the symbol of his kinship with this immensity; as the pledge of his correlation with the universal order. With a sense of exultation his thoughts reverted to that sanctuary from whose precincts he had beheld it first. It was with him still. And was not a benign spirit ever there to bestow consolation upon a hapless wayfarer whose journeyings were hopeless, endless, fruitless, fraught with cruel degradation?

He still lay in the boat, not feeling hunger nor susceptible to the cold of the night. Time and space had lost their significance. He would only ask to lie where he was, on the bosom of the waters, that he might croon his strange songs for ever. But as his gaze was still fixed on the only star that was abroad in all the vast canopy, the recollection of the little room and of him who dwelt there, shaped itself more definitely. He must return; he was being drawn thither by irresistible forces. His destiny must be fulfilled.

The keel of the boat began to grind on the sand. He listened to the melodious yet uncouth tones of the old boatman — the old ferryman, who had piloted him across the bosom of eternity.

"We've been out six hours," said the old boatman. "It is nigh half-past eight."

The young man stepped ashore with cramped and stiff limbs.

"What is half-past eight, Father Charon?" he said, with a hoarse, happy laugh.

Hardly had the returned voyager uttered these irrelevant words when a voice of curious import came on his ears. He shuddered as though he had felt the impact of a knife upon his flesh.

"Luney, Luney!" cried the voice, "I have been looking for you for hours, all along the shore. You were not at the station so I made sure you had drowned yourself. What a madman you are; where do you suppose you have been? As long as I live I will never bring you to Margate again."

"Oh yes," said the returned voyager, with a weary shiver, "I know that voice — that voice is as familiar to me as the stars of the night."

XXVIII

WILLIAM JORDAN'S startling misconduct on this historic day was not lightly passed over by that distinguished circle of which Mr. James Dodson was the natural leader. They made rather a point of insisting that their accomplished friend should forego the society of the culprit for the future.

"As long as we thought he was a mere harmless lunatic, Jimmy," said Mr. John Dobbs, "we didn't so much mind your taking him up, although we all thought from the first that for a chap like you to do so was coming down a peg. But now that we find out that he is not a harmless lunatic at all, but a downright dangerous one, we think you owe it to yourself that you should give him the cold shoulder altogether."

To which expression of well-meaning wisdom Mr. Dodson rejoined tactfully, "I dare say you may be perfectly right, John. I shall have to think it over."

All the same in the inscrutable recesses of Mr. Dodson's heart there was no clearly defined intention of acting upon this disinterested advice. Mr. James Dodson was pre-eminently a man of the world, "a two and two makes four" man, in his own phrase, yet a stealthy feeling had already taken root within him, which somehow forbade the philosopher to fol-

low the dictates of pure reason with the implicit fidelity that was his wont. He had nothing to gain by association with such a person as William Jordan, Junior, for even his faculty of speaking Greek like a native, had by this time become a theme for derision among Mr. Dodson's intimates; yet when the eminent worldling and philosopher came closely to scrutinize his own personal dealings with this very odd specimen of humanity, it began to appear that he was no longer his own master.

"I feel, you know, Luney," he confessed, in one of his moments of expansiveness, "I am behaving like a fool in taking you up like I do. I am acting against my own interests. You will never do anything; you are d——d unpopular with all my pals; you are not a bit bright or clever; you never drink or smoke or bet or make love to the ladies; you can't hold your own even with a chap like young Davis; even when your leg is being pulled you haven't got the sense to notice it; in short, Luney, and in a word, you are just a worm; but, somehow, there is an odd sort of something about you that I feel I can't do without. What it is I don't know. If you were a girl I should say it was love; and yet, my son, I'll swear to you on my solemn oath that I don't believe there is such a thing as love. All the talk about it, all the plays and penny novelettes about it, are the biggest bunkum imaginable."

However, in spite of many speeches as uncompromising as this, Mr. Dodson could not bring himself

to relinquish his patronage of his strange companion. Seldom can a more incongruous pair have walked together along the perilous paths of the great nowhither, since the far-off days of the Knight of La Mancha and his faithful squire. And it chanced that on the eve of the very next Bank Holiday, which befell on a stifling day in August, when the town lay choked in dust and seemed to swoon with the arid air, Mr. Dodson made the proposal to his singular friend that they should go forth on that festal day and "see a bit of life" together.

"No more Margate, my son," said Mr. Dodson, "never again, as long as I live, will I go with you there. But we will spend a day at the Oval, my boy — they are giving Joe Cox a trial for the first eleven, and we must see what he does. Then we will get a bit of dinner somewhere, and round up the evening at the Alcazar. You have never seen Hermione in full war paint, have you? Off the stage she is a bit of all right, but on it, my son, she beats anything you ever saw. When you see her she will knock you."

To this carefully devised program William Jordan assented submissively. During this phase of his existence, when every day that he passed brought a further largesse of knowledge, the overpowering curiosity to see, to know, to understand all things seemed to return upon him. His mentor had taken him already into divers and strange places. He owed it to that friendly but mysterious guidance that the

curtain was rolled back from many hidden recesses of the life about him, which otherwise could never have been revealed.

On that burning August forenoon he mingled with the throng about the gates of the cricket-ground, and passed through its portals and came to stand on the parched grass under the pitiless sun. All about him was a close-packed and vastly excited multitude. Yet to the young man, who was sandwiched within the very heart of the perspiring crowd of street-persons, with the skin being frizzled upon his neck, the solemn rites, of which occasionally he caught a glimpse, had no meaning for his eyes.

"Surrey's fielding," said his mentor, in a voice that was by no means as calm as was its wont. "See, there's Joe standing at mid-on. Why don't they put him on to bowl?"

"Not his wicket," said Mr. Dodson's neighbor, an enthusiast in a straw hat with a yellow ribbon, and dirty white flannel trousers.

"Then why do they play him?" demanded Mr. Dodson.

"The Committee have had private information of a thunderstorm to-morrow night," said Mr. Dodson's neighbor, who appeared to be extremely well-informed.

To Mr. William Jordan, however, these technicalities and a thousand others, which were even more recondite, proved very baffling indeed.

"I suppose, Jimmy," said the young man at last,

in sheer desperation, driven by the inflexible rules of politeness to speak, yet not knowing in the least what to say, "that those street-per — those gentlemen in the white suits are what you call Surrey?"

"You are positively brilliant this morning, Luney," said his mentor. "You sparkle. Upon my word, you are nearly as bright as the sun."

After standing two hours in that broiling heat, and as he was growing somewhat dizzy, owing to the effects of that concentrated fireball upon the back of his neck, the players trooped off the field of play in search of refreshment, whereupon Mr. Dodson solemnly instructed him to sit on an adjacent mound of withered grass to await his own return, assuring him "that he was not half smart enough to forage for himself at the Oval on August Bank Holiday."

In the course of half-an-hour Mr. Dodson did return, bearing two corkless bottles covered with oozing white froth, and four substantial and extremely indigestible-looking pork pies.

"Catch hold," said Mr. Dodson, handing Mr. William Jordan, Junior, his share of these delicacies.

"These pies are topping, ain't they?" said Mr. Dodson, after his teeth had met therein with immense satisfaction to themselves.

Mr. Dodson then applied his mouth to the neck of a bottle.

"There is nothing in this world," said Mr. Dod-

son, after having sucked an immoderate quantity of froth, "whatever there may be in the next, to compare with a bottle of Bass."

Mr. Dodson returned with renewed vigor to the pork pies.

"Buck up, Luney," he said, as he masticated the last succulent morsel. "The players will be out again in five minutes. Why, man, what the dickens are you up to! Your Bass is all over the grass, and your pies are underneath it. Luney, you idiot! —'pon my word, I do believe the wretched lunatic has fainted."

Mr. Dodson's diagnosis of his friend's condition proved to be a correct one. He had to lay him upon his back and to obtain water before the eyes could be induced to re-open, and the blood to return to the hollow cheeks. Play had begun, Mr. Dodson was hot and irritable, and he was vowing freely that if he valued his self-respect he must break himself of the habit of dragging round this hopeless subject to acquaint it with "life"; yet in spite of all this, when the young man at last opened his eyes, his mentor said, quite kindly, "Was it the heat, old boy?"

"Yes — the heat," said William Jordan faintly.

Mr. Dodson conducted his friend to the shade that was afforded by the back of an immense stand, upon which several thousands of human beings — wedged as tightly together as dried figs in a box — braved the broiling heat of the airless afternoon, craning and tiptoeing to witness a trial of skill of a curi-

ously inconsequent and macabre kind, with whose niceties the vast majority were very imperfectly acquainted.

"You will be all right here, old boy," said Mr. Dodson, propping up his friend, and taking off his own coat to form a pillow for his head. "You will be nice and cool here. Lie quite still, and I will get you a drop of brandy."

As Mr. Dodson made his way through the crowd to an awning, upon which was displayed the word "Refreshments," there was a demonstration of approval from many thousands of pairs of hands.

"What's up?" demanded Mr. Dodson, as he passed along. "Is Gunn out?"

"No," said a spectator, who was perspiring freely in spite of the fact that he wore a halo of cabbage-leaves under his straw hat. "They are putting on young Cox."

"Time they did," said Mr. Dodson.

For a moment a Titanic struggle was waged in the bosom of the philosopher. He could not forbear to pause a moment to watch how his friend Joe Cox fared in his hour of trial, yet even before he beheld him deliver his first ball, he bent his neck again to the stern yoke of duty. Hurriedly he went on his way for the brandy.

As he returned bearing this stimulant, he stayed again for an instant to inquire of his informant of the cabbage-leaves, how young Cox was bowling.

"Can't bowl for nuts," said the gentleman of the cabbage-leaves. "Gunn has just hit him out of the ground. I could bowl better myself."

It was with a sinking heart that the philosopher handed the brandy to William Jordan, who, however, could not be induced to taste it.

"How are you feeling, old boy?" said Mr. Dodson; and he added eagerly, "Joe Cox is bowling. I wish he would get a wicket."

"M-my m-mind is now quite clear," said his strange companion. "P-please l-leave me to lie here. I would have you join your friends who are so — so active and powerful and high-hearted. Go to look at — at the cricket game, I entreat you. Whenever we go forth together I make you unhappy. I — I spoil your day. I would have you leave me altogether, kind and honest friend; I am no fit comrade for such as you. I — I begin to understand that I am one of other clay."

After Mr. James Dodson had turned away his face in order that he might register the enigmatic aside, "I am afraid it is quite true that poor cove is absolutely balmy," he said to the pallid figure in a voice of cheerful kindness, "Rot! Rubbish! You are talking through your hat. It is only in fun that I call you Luney. I tell you candidly, my son, that if I could speak Greek like a native, the same as you do, I would see a chap like James Dodson d——d before I would even nod to him in the street."

"You cannot deceive me, Jimmy," said William

Jordan, with a forlorn smile. "Fate has not made me the equal of you and your friends. I — I b-begin now to understand that I am one of other mold and texture. All these myriads of street-persons whose loud voices are all around me, whose seed is as profuse as the leaves of the forest, have received some high gift from Fate which has been withheld from me. I entreat you to leave me, good friend; such as I can only make you contemptuous; I would have you consort with your kind."

It was not, however, at the behest of William Jordan that his mentor left him, but in obedience to a mighty roar that arose from twenty thousand parched throats.

"It is a wicket, I'm certain," cried the philosopher, with an excitement of which few would have suspected him to be capable.

"Who's out?" he demanded, of the nearest group of spectators.

"Gunn."

"How?"

"Caught at the wicket."

"Bowler?"

"Young Cox."

The philosopher returned to the pallid figure upon the grass, with a demeanor that was curiously out of key with the dignity of his natural character.

"Luney, old boy!" he cried, flinging his hat in the air, "Joe Cox has got out the great Gunn."

Although this thrilling announcement had no sig-

nificance for him whose head was propped upon a coat against a brick wall, a gentle smile crept across the gaunt features.

"I am sure that must be — must be very nice, Jimmy," he said, "very nice indeed."

"Nice!" exclaimed the philosopher, almost fiercely, "what a word to use! To say, Luney, that you set up to be a scholar you do use the rummest lingo. Joe Cox gets out the great Gunn, and you call it 'nice!' James Dodson don't pretend to be a scholar, my son, but he knows better than to call Homer 'nice'!"

William Jordan suffered this rebuke in a melancholy silence. He seemed to understand how thoroughly it was merited.

He lay for the better part of that stifling August afternoon propped up within the shade of the brick wall. In spite of his earnest entreaties Jimmy Dodson could not be induced to forsake him. His mentor would climb up on to one of the neighboring coigns of vantage, and standing on tiptoe would snatch a few brief, but inexpressibly sweet glimpses of the solemn ceremonial that was being enacted. But ever and anon he would return to see how his stricken companion was getting on.

Rest, and the mellower influences of the late afternoon served to place William Jordan on his legs once more; and although his brain roared as though it contained the waves of the sea, and his limbs ached, and his whole frame shook so violently that it was as if he had been smitten with a palsy, he declined to

admit that he was other than restored completely to health and vigor. He was fearful lest he should wreck the plans of his mentor more completely than he had already done; therefore summoning every spark of resolution to his aid, he vowed, even if he were to perish in the effort, that he would accompany his kind friend to the restaurant; and thereafter to the Alcazar Theatre.

He dined in state at a gorgeous house of polite eating, yet it was scant justice he did to the sumptuous fare. Mr. James Dodson was frankly disappointed at this further manifestation of his companion's shortcomings, yet he dissembled his feelings in an elegant preoccupation with six courses. To the repeated inquiries as to how he felt, Mr. William Jordan returned assurances which, if allowed to pass muster, could not in any sense be said to carry conviction. And at last Mr. Dodson was fain to exclaim, "Look here, my son, if you don't eat something soon, you can't possibly go to the Alcazar." And although Mr. Jordan was not in the least desirous of going to the Alcazar, he made quite suddenly a superhuman attack on a banana in order to save himself the humiliation of being a source of further disappointment to his mentor.

The young man felt himself to be a little more resolute, and a trifle more composed by the time he found himself seated in a balcony of the Alcazar Theatre. In spite of the circumstance that the great garish building was thronged with many hundreds

of street-persons, the majority of whom appeared to be emitting most acrid and penetrating fumes from their mouths, the air was much cooler there than it had been anywhere else that day.

The curtain was up, the band was playing, the stage was a blaze of light, and a lady of Amazonian proportions was singing a song, not a word of which was intelligible to William Jordan. But he lay back in the purple velvet cushion of his fauteuil, reclining almost pleasantly, and looking up at the ceiling, upon which, in crude tints, somewhat obscured by the all-pervading fumes of tobacco, was a not particularly reticent presentment of the Muses. In a circle round these was painted in large and unmistakable letters the following names: Shakespeare, Jonson, Milton, Spenser, Dryden, Tupper, Wordsworth, Macready.

"We can hardly see John Dobbs from here," said Mr. James Dodson, who reclined by the young man's side. "He is the third chap playing the fiddle down there in the well, but I can only just catch the top of his head."

William Jordan continued to recline in reasonable surcease from bodily pangs for several hours. Further, he was able to evade Mr. Dodson's repeated and pressing invitations to accompany him to the refreshment buffet. And at last, towards the hour of ten, the chief event of the evening, the War and Peace Ballet, was heralded by a fanfare of trumpets and loud crashings of music.

"Now then, my son, sit tight," said Mr. Dodson. "We are going to see Hermione."

The curtain rose slowly to reveal Hera, the white-armed goddess. She was clad in dazzling robes of mail and a massive helmet, with ear-pieces dangling about her golden locks. William Jordan gave a gasp of bewilderment; pain and pleasure contending for mastery swelled his veins with intolerable pangs. This was the goddess, this was she. His eerie pilgrimage to the evening party flooded back into his thoughts. Yes, this was the goddess whose hand he had touched. And now, as she stood clothed in her robes of mail and bearing her sceptre, with wonderful lights playing around her majestical calm, she appeared to the young man's rapt gaze the first of the goddesses, and, therefore, the most beautiful, the most chaste, the most exalted creature, of which fact or fable was cognizant.

"Ain't she a stunner," said the voice of Mr. Dodson, breaking upon his reverie. "If I hadn't decided that all women are alike, as far as a rising man is concerned, I'm hanged if I wouldn't have a cut at her myself. She is a bit of all right though, Luney. I think we'll trot round to the stage door and see her after the show."

Such words as these, however, were unintelligible to William Jordan. Who shall say to what magic clime his thoughts had been transported! It had been given to him to touch the hand of this divinity, to hear the words that fell from her lips. The sub-

sequent clashings of the loud music, the feasts of garish color, the undulations of the swaying forms, the bursts of applause, the laughter and gaiety, excited the young man to a fierce happiness that was almost intolerable.

He seemed to lie in a swoon of pleasure on the purple cushions in that vast music-hall. For one brief but enchanted hour he knew strange joys that he had not thought the great world out of doors could offer. There had been a time when he had almost ventured to despise the dreary existences these street-persons led, which he conceived to be so remote from the life of heroic freedom as depicted in the pages of the ancient authors. But how great had been his ignorance! These street-persons, who spoke such a curious language, who ate such queer foods, who performed such odd acts, how reticent they were in regard to those incomparable pleasures to which they could always turn, and how chastely they enjoyed them!

These street-persons, whom he had almost ventured to despise, could go to the sea in the course of an hour, that sea which, in its noble reality so far transcended the most wonderful descriptions in the pages of the ancient authors. They had their exquisite landscapes, whose sweet yet accessible grandeur almost made Virgil seem harsh and lacking in dignity; they had their goddesses who walked their streets in a frank admission of their kinship, who rejoiced with them, who sat with them at meat. Yet all these things

which were so much rarer, so much holier, so much more explicit than all the wonders the ancient authors could contrive, how calmly they took them! To them they seemed the commonplaces of every-day life.

He had never realized so clearly as now that he lay in these delectable cushions feasting his intense imagination on the peerless and chaste beauty that made his eyes grow dark, that these millions of street-persons, whom, in his incomprehensible blindness, he had come so nearly to despise, were the true Olympians. And he himself, he whom he had presumed to identify with the proudest name in Elysium, was the common and spurious clay who had walked the bountiful earth with a closed heart, a veritable groveler in the gross mud of the dreadful chimera-city, which was no more than the embodiment of his craven fears. He had not understood that the fair mountains, the multitudinous seas, the divine heroes, the ravishing goddesses were all about him; he had not understood that their presence was a fact so common to the experience of all these millions upon millians of true Olympians who were their peers, that they were received without comment and even made to serve their needs.

When the curtain descended again and the great audience began to disperse, and that incomparable hour of existence was at an end, he said as he moved through the doors with his mentor, "I — I am marveling, Jimmy, how w-wonderfully you have kept the secret of my birth."

"The secret of your birth, my son," said Jimmy

Dodson, "the secret of your birth! Why, you cuckoo, it is you, not I, who have kept the secret. You never told me, you know, although I think you ought, because my old aunt Tabitha is always questioning me about you every time I see her. The old girl declares you come of a county family."

"No no, Jimmy," said the young man, "you must have known from the first that I was not — not of the blood royal."

"Not of the blood royal, my son," said Mr. Dodson, with frank astonishment. "Not of the blood royal! Why, what will you be saying next. I don't mind telling you I should have been mighty surprised had I known you were. I don't think Octavius would have had you long on that stool, wielding that pot of paste. At the very least he would have had you under a glass case in his private room."

"I mean, Jimmy," said the young man, "of the same blood royal as yourself, and all these happy and vigorous and beautiful street-persons — I see now, Jimmy, that they are all beautiful — who are walking forth into their native air."

"I give you up, my son," said Mr. Dodson, with an indulgence born of three whiskies and sodas. "I can only say one thing, and that is that a mere vulgar commoner, like James Dodson, is simply incapable of following you at even a respectful distance."

"But you are not of the vulgar at all, Jimmy; it is I, William Jordan, who have considered myself to be of the kin of heroes, who am the plebeian."

"Have it as you please, my son," said the eminent

philosopher. "You are altogether beyond me to-night, you are altogether over my head."

He linked his arm through that of his excited companion.

"Come on, old boy," he said, "round to the stage door. We might be able to get a word with Hermione Leigh."

"Y-you m-mean Hera, the white-armed goddess."

"Yes, my son, I mean Hera — or Diana — or Joan of Arc — or Jane Cakebread — or Mother Hubbard, or any other bit of skirt."

"Yes, he is a true Olympian," muttered the young man, "he is so imperturbable. And I — and I, who would run and shout with the fever in my veins, O pious gods, what misbegotten carrion am I?"

"I never saw the poor chap so absolutely balmy as he is to-night," said Mr. Dodson, also speaking his thoughts aloud. "The poor cove is not used to a day in the sun."

At the stage door they waited patiently for the apparition of the goddess. Various divinities, whose immortal qualities were effectually dissembled by straw hats and tailor-made costumes, came forth and went their way. Some of these had a nod for Mr. Dodson, whose finished manner, general air of friendliness, and openhanded liberality "when he was in brass," made him a welcome addition to any society which he chose to enter.

"Did you notice the fairy who nodded, my son?" said Mr. Dodson, with an air of pride, which his com-

panion felt to be natural. "That was Vi Nicholson. A bit of mustard is Violet. She will be on at the Hilarity soon."

"You mean Briseis?"

"Yes, my son, I mean Briseis — or Mother Brownrigg — or Lady Jane Grey. Hullo, here's Hermione."

As the divinity approached, with her straw hat tilted with severe indifference over her eyes, and her skirt sweeping the dust of the narrow alley which led to the stage door, William Jordan clutched the arm of his mentor fiercely. He felt his excitement to be overcoming him.

"Hullo, Jimmy," said the divinity, with the particular wave of the hand that then happened to be fashionable.

"Is the Bart about?" inquired Mr. Dodson.

"No," said the divinity. "He has gone to Cowes with his ma."

"Well, I can't spring more than stout and oysters," said Mr. Dodson. "Don't get many winners these times. Are you taking any?"

"Don't mind," said the goddess, with easy condescension.

"Come on then, round the corner."

"Why," said the goddess, "if that ain't our poet, our own live little, tame little pet poet. What will mother say that her boy has been out so late. Been to a naughty place, too."

"How — how — how do you do?" stammered Wil-

liam Jordan hoarsely, as he removed his hat and bowed low.

"Oh, chuck it!" said the goddess, "or the crowd will think you are doing it for money."

As they entered the saloon, in which they proposed to partake of supper, Mr. Dodson said to the goddess, "Kid, I'll lay you a shilling you can't make the poet tackle stout and oysters."

"A bet," said that good-natured divinity.

On the appearance of these robust delicacies, Mr. Dodson laid a dozen oysters, a pint of stout, and a plate of brown bread-and-butter before Mr. William Jordan.

"Now then, my son," said Mr. Dodson, with a wink at the goddess, "show Hera what you can do."

A shudder of horror invaded the young man's frame as he cast a glance of appeal at that stern deity.

"Not a bit of use, Mr. Tennyson," said the relentless one, "you don't leave this table until you have taken your whack."

Although unable to comprehend the precise terms in which the goddess embodied her mandate, the despairing young man understood its purport only too well. In spite, however, of a sustained effort that approximated to real heroism, he had only swallowed half an oyster, two pieces of bread-and-butter, and sipped a small quantity of an ink-colored beverage, of which the goddess availed herself freely, by the

time Mr. James Dodson and the white-armed Hera had concluded their own exertions, which had appeared to afford them immense satisfaction.

Thereupon the goddess conceived it to be her duty to hold each oyster in its turn on a fork and compel, by the exercise of her own imperious will, "the poet" to swallow these delicacies. When this task had been fulfilled she said, "Now, Alfred, set about that stout as if you meant it, and then I'll touch Jimmy for a bob."

XXIX

The reveler who crept back to 43 Milton Street, E.C., towards the hour of one was a dishevelled, bewildered human fragment in sore distress of mind and body. His head throbbed, and dreadful qualms oppressed him, but these were as nought in comparison with that which had already taken a sinister shape in his brain.

Fate had made him a mock. He, to whom life was a sacrament, was unworthy to participate in this full-blooded, heroic, many-sided existence that was all about him. To what monstrous perversion of the faculties had he been subjected? The sea, the sky, the birds, the green fields, the wisdom and poetry of past ages, the intercourse with heroes and goddesses, could cast spells upon him which not even prayer could appease. Yet, what was this exaltation by comparison with that lusty, high-hearted genius which accepted all these incomparable things as neither more nor less than an immemorial right; a native arrogance that could defile the bosom of the sea, mutilate the fairest landscapes, poison the sky with the smoke of cities, wantonly destroy the glorious life that enriched the very air it breathed.

He had been living his days in the midst of the true Olympians, and he had not known it. Well

might they torment him in spirit and body. He was nought but the weakest of charlatans, who sought to dissemble the poverty of his nature with dreams of the life he was too puny to embrace. But this ignoble self-deception had been only too clear to others. From the first, those whom he called "street-persons" had seen him for what he was. And they had not failed to requite him with every indignity. Yet surely there was irony in the decree that withheld from him the true facts of the existence of which he was born to partake. He, the tired wayfarer who had strayed from Olympus, had conceived that on a day, after a sojourn upon the dark, inhospitable earth, he would be permitted to return to his immortal peers and companions. But how strangely had he deceived himself! He was no Olympian; he had no right to consort with the heroes and gods. For he was dwelling in Olympus now; the persons who thronged the streets of the great city were those shining ones of whom he constantly dreamed. And in their transcendent greatness they made a jest of their condition. And they amused themselves by tormenting this impostor who presumed to ruffle it among them: by perverting his ears, that their noble speech should appear uncouth; by perverting his eyes, that their sacred exercises should seem meaningless; by perverting his taste, so that it came to loathe the choice foods by which they were sustained!

"O my father," he cried as he staggered into the little room with his throbbing brain, "I pray you

show me that passage in the Book of the Ages in which the deluded earth-mortal, having presumed to consider himself of the kin of the gods, is borne to Olympus secretly, without his own knowledge; and its inhabitants, in order to mock him, force him to believe he is still on earth."

His father regarded him with a wistful patience.

"O why do you call me Achilles, my father? Why did you permit me to call myself by that proud name?" cried the young man. "I am one of other stature. I have deluded myself miserably; I am the sport of those with whom I would claim kin."

"We are neither less nor more, O Achilles, than we deem ourselves to be," said the white-haired man, peering towards the distressed wayfarer with an ineffable compassion in his eyes.

To this hard saying of his father's the young man devoted many hours of scrutiny. He turned again and again to the pages of those ancient authors he had made his own. But even these in their wisdom could shed no light upon the dark path upon which he was now entered. When, having overcome his first dismay that these friends of his youth, having connived at his self-deception, should now play him false, and, pale with conflict, he turned sternly to confront the crisis of his fate, he strove to make himself familiar with the writings of the later schoolmen, those authors of modern growth at whom his instinct shuddered as abortions, or perverted births.

He burnt the midnight lamp full many nights.

He attended the ignoble duties of the day as formerly, rendering his service scrupulously in return for the pieces of silver he received. But, in the little room, he spent the long watches of the night in profound intercourse with himself and with the modern spirit. Never before had he addressed himself to the study of natural objects in their relations to their surroundings. The wondrous subtleties of these modern authors repelled him constantly, for with all their faculties, which were trained to a perilous point, they were often inept, and inclined to be gross. Yet there were many things pertaining to his own condition which he was now beginning dimly to perceive, which they taught him how to appraise in the scales of his reason; but often in the midnight hours they caused him to shed tears.

"Dost thou forget the Book of the Ages, my beloved?" said his father one night, as he was immersed with a countenance of despair in these remorseless pages.

His father took down the massive tome from the shelf, and laid it open at a familiar passage, which his own eyes were never weary of conning.

"Let us not forget the rotations of the circle, beloved one," said his father. "Must we not ever return by the path that we went upon?"

It brought unspeakable joy to the young man that, in spite of many months of intercourse with the modern authors, his father's great tome still retained the power to afford him consolation.

"These dread speculations which come no-whence and return no-whither," said the young man, "appear to cast a green haze, as of putrefying flesh, upon the minds of these modern authors, who strive to fill eternity itself with the laughter of Bedlam."

One day of autumn the young man walked abroad with his father until they came to the woods. Here in a sombre and quiet glade, which the winds had already stripped, he gathered flowers.

"I think, my father," he said as his slender fingers wove them together with a piece of grass, "I shall now have the courage to offer these beautiful creatures of the fields to that goddess who is always in my dreams."

Upon the evening of the next day the young man discarded his books for the first time for many weeks. Hastening homewards from his daily toil, he arrayed himself in that uncomfortable garb in which he had been first privileged to behold the goddess, and betook himself, devout of heart, to the garish music-hall. He was able to make his way to the chair he had previously occupied, and here, waiting patiently, but this time alone, he again beheld the object of his worship. In all their sanctity the raptures of that former hour returned upon him. How chaste, yet how ravishing seemed this goddess in the shape of a human animal! How was it possible to doubt of her affinity with the immortals? One glance at her noble radiance sufficed

to counteract the poison that was distilled by the pages of the modern authors.

They openly mocked at the incarnation of divinities. They even denied an existence to a higher state. They even declared that the very life in his veins was but the expression of a coarse jest, in questionable taste, on the part of One who was old enough to know better. And yet these modern authors knew how to clothe their levity with a witty and bitter shrewdness which could counterfeit universal truth. How he could recall the cynical language of one of the chief among them: "What a stupid and tasteless farce is this, my dear friends. Here are we pierrots and harlequins, we betasselled clowns and buffoons, with many a score of other harmless, mad fools, whose names I forgot, yet all have the same meaning — here are we, I say, with our silly grimaces, which make us sweat blood mixed with salt tears, here are we ruffling it in cockades and gold lace, and orders and what not; strutting about like turkeys, so that we may delude ourselves into forgetting that the whole business in which we are engaged is a harlequinade of such vile grossness that only an unpardonable oversight of some obscure and malicious Authority obtained for it a license to be performed publicly."

With what diabolical cunning had this modern expressed himself! How true it was of that vapid farceur, William Jordan! For how many years had

this poor dolt in the farce kept up his courage by pretending to kinship with the immortal ones? And here he sat to-night, poor, stupid charlatan! the derided of heaven, in his evening suit and excruciatingly tight shoes, cherishing the idea that he was about to bestow a votive offering upon one of the divinities. Yea, that master of mockery had caught the features of this William Jordan as neatly as though he alone were the archetype of poor deluded human nature! There he sat in his black coat and white tie, this stupid dolt in the farce, solemnly pretending to thoughts of goddesses. And yet this mocking modern assured him with a pretense of equal solemnity that even goddesses did not exist outside the portals of Bedlam.

At the conclusion of the performance the young man passed out with the careless throng of street-persons, those Olympian *blasés* who were half-sick of goddesses, and yawned in their faces. Remembering his former pilgrimage, he betook himself, with the bunch of flowers in his hand, to the narrow alley leading to the stage-door. It seemed a miraculous coincidence that one of the mightiest of the earth-poets should have written in his book, "All the world's a stage," and that the word "Stage-door" should now loom before his eyes, above the magic portal out of which the divinity was to issue, clad in flesh and blood. And yet it seemed still more miraculous that these sovereign intelligences could bring themselves to utter such poor commonplaces as these, which must

be so plain to the meanest minds that they did not call for expression!

He beheld the noble form of the goddess emerge from the stage-door. To-night she affected no humble straw hat and trailing, dusty skirt. She was attired as became her quality in a fine cloak and jewels. Her head was borne loftily, her eyes shone. This was the goddess, this was she. He clutched the bunch of flowers convulsively. Was such an offering meet for a goddess? Yes, they were creatures of the honest woodland pastures, even as herself. Even if she spurned them underfoot they should be offered to her.

Already he had his hat in his hand, that it might sweep the earth; already words of homage had formed upon his lips. She was almost touching him with her fine raiment, and he was beginning to speak, when a splendid, handsome street-person, clad in furs, strode between her and his offering. In an instant she had passed. Yet the goddess had seen the bunch of flowers, for as she went by she looked steadily into the eyes of him who had dared to proffer them. She gave a little laugh, which made him draw in his breath as though he experienced the stroke of a knife.

He went back into sanctuary to the little room, tormented into fever by a distress which he knew to be the measure of his weakness. Yet surely it was fitting that a goddess should despise him for having pretended to be what he was not.

From this tragic evening he was unable to kneel

in the little room. Like a barque that the fierce tempest had cast from its moorings into the trough of the merciless waves, he was tossed hither and thither among the deep waters, so that he lost all faith in his own power.

Sometimes in his anguish he could not forbear to complain against Fate, as had so often been recorded of weak mortals in the pages of the ancient authors. Yet an act so ignoble was one proof the more of his inferiority. He heard the accent of earth's lowliest in his own lament. He began to envy the persons in the streets of the great city, those thrice-blessed Olympians who were unvisited by doubt and by constant repining. These did not doubt of their own divinity. Even that clay which at first he had thought so common, that of his mentor James Dodson, who in his heart despised him utterly, but who in his contemptuous clemency forbore from rejecting him, even he made no secret of the fact that, had he not learned to experience a profound distrust of the female sex, he would have claimed the hand of the goddess in marriage. Yet one of the clay of William Jordan was not permitted to prostrate himself in the earth before her.

Research among the modern authors afforded him neither light nor healing; and in this dark hour he did not dare to carry his plaint to those of older growth. Indeed, his desertion of them for these lesser spirits had come to seem like an act of sedition. But soon a darker tragedy was to divert the channel of his thoughts.

XXX

One night, long after midnight had passed, the white-haired man, his father, said to him, "My beloved Achilles, hast thou the strength to contemplate a woeful calamity?"

The sound of the aged voice, as sorrowful as the autumn winds among the chimney-pots, caused the young man to lift his sunken eyes from the page upon which they lay.

"Is it, O my father," he said, "that we are threatened with the most dire of all catastrophes?"

"Yes, my beloved," said his father. "Indeed, the most dire of all catastrophes is consummated already. This is the morning of Monday. If — how shall I reveal it to thee, Achilles" (the anguish in the eyes of the old man was insupportable)—"if by Friday at noon we cannot obtain twenty pieces of gold for the price of our roof, we shall be driven forth of our little room, thou and I, beloved one, into the gross darkness of the streets of the great city."

At first the young man's mind was like a blank page, but all too soon it became susceptible to the words his father had uttered. "O my father!" he cried, "I have known these many days that Fate was devising some cruel and bloody trial for this craven's heart." And then, as a passionate horror swelled

his veins, he cried, "This is the untold evil which all my life has lain upon my heart. I have such a bitter horror of the streets of the great city, my father, that I would prefer to embrace death."

The face of the old man was like that of a corpse.

"Do I not know it, my beloved?" he said. "Was it not these loins that imbued this horror in thy tender veins? Yet Fate has spoken; only one thing remains unto us."

"What is this thing, my father?"

"We can but pray for a miracle to happen."

"Ah, my father," said the young man in a hoarse, croaking whisper, "miracles do not happen."

"The modern authors have declared it thus in their books," said the white-haired man, his father, "but in the Book of the Ages is it not recorded otherwise?"

"Reveal to me the written words, my father, I beseech thee," said the young man, with the eagerness of one who thirsts.

The aged man, his father, lifted the mighty tome from the shelf, and, opening it at a page that contained no writing, placed his finger thereupon.

"See, beloved one," said the aged man, with a meek triumph in his faint eyes, "it is there written."

The young man turned to the passage with the frenzy of one devoured by pangs.

"Why, my father," he cried out, "there is noth-

ing there. The page is empty. It is all dark to my gaze."

"Nay, beloved one," said his father. "It is written there in sober verity. I have conned the page a thousand times. Look again, beloved one, I beseech thee."

Again the young man traversed the page with his gaunt eyes.

"Oh, gentle Zeus," he cried in a terror that was piteous to behold, "the page is blank; it contains no writing. I am to be cast into the streets of the great city."

The wretched young man sank to his knees in the little room, biting at his nails.

XXXI

MANY hours passed ere the young man dared to meet this great horror that had come into his life. From the dawn of his earliest consciousness this dark shadow had lain in his thoughts. Yet never had they had the resolution to contemplate it. All his life he had seemed to know that such a contingency, should it ever befall, would be beyond his strength to endure.

As during this week of mental and moral eclipse he sought to prefigure what an existence upon the earth would mean without that sanctuary for the broken wayfarer, reason itself seemed to decline to accept the alternative. One night in the depths of his despair there crept into his brain a vision of the dark and mighty Thames, that noble symbol upon which he had so often gazed; and had the power of prayer remained to him, he would have sought the resolution to terminate within its cold bosom his vicissitudes upon the earth.

In the height, however, of this gross terror, his eyes beheld the aged man, his father, at the other side of the table, that guide and protector and strong hand in his youth. What was his own pass in comparison with that of one so frail and venerable. He himself, by virtue of the youth in his veins, was fitted

to cope with the cruel and licentious hordes that thronged the streets of the great city; but this aged man, whose sap was dry, whose vigor had burnt itself out, in what manner could his white hairs accept the last stern decree of Fate?

He, too, throughout all his days had been sustained by that sanctuary. And now he was old he was to be cast into those remorseless streets which would deride his feebleness, assault his white hairs. The vision of his father, alone and without shelter in the streets of the great city, seemed to complete his own degradation. What manner of a man was he to give his thoughts to the river, when circumstance had made its first imperious call upon him. He who had lain under the protection of a father all his days, must, now that he had obtained the estate of manhood, become himself the protector of one who was old.

It was with the hurry of a great cowardice that he turned to the ancient authors to ask his course. Their reply was unanimous and uncompromising; yet to one of his cast of nature it was almost cynical. He must act. He who could hardly tread his way through the crowd of street-persons, whose lightest utterance, whose smallest resolve was a pretext for the mockery of all who pressed around him and trampled him with their feet, must gird his loins.

When he recalled what he had already endured in his strivings to fulfil the simplest offices, which his Olympian companions performed automatically, the

blood within him flowed as water. Yet if he failed to procure twenty pieces of gold by next Friday at noon, his aged father would be cast to the mercy of the streets.

Every instant that he passed now seemed to increase his impotence. He should be doing, acting; yet he was pasting labels on parcels, or he was sitting in frantic self-communion in the little room. He was wasting hours of ineffable price. "Action, Action, Action!" cried the ancient authors eternally in his ears; "if you fail to act immediately, O Achilles, you will commit the most sacred and venerable form in the world to the pavements of the great city." Yet there he still sat in the little room with the pall still upon his heart and his brain.

At the other side of the table sat the aged man, his father, ever reading in the Book of the Ages. With the childlike simplicity of his many years on the earth, he had sat him down to wait for a miracle to happen. What a heroic resolution and fortitude was required to do that! Yet those faint eyes could read all that was written in the Book of the Ages — perhaps as the reward of their heroic constancy, or perhaps as the cause of it.

Yet it was not for him to sit down in simple faith and wait for a miracle to happen, for the once potent belief of this craven's heart had been plucked out ruthlessly. It was not for him to summon that ineffable courage, which, as the frail barque is engulfed in the waves, can regard the cold sea as though it

were the dry land. During the phase upon which he was now entered he had no belief in himself. Formerly when he resolved to accomplish the most trivial tasks, yet failed lamentably to do so, he was ever Achilles. But now — what was he now? He was less than a worm writhing through mire.

No, miracles did not happen to those like himself. On the evening of the Wednesday in that fatal week he felt he could not return to the little room to stretch his faint resolution once more upon the rack. Therefore he wandered aimlessly up and down the streets of the great city. And in the course of his wanderings he came at last to the river. As he came to the quiet bridge on which the lamps were flickering through the chill, rainy darkness, the Thames at full tide gurgled beneath. Gazing down at these stealthy, all-effacing waters, an irresistible impulse overcame him. It became essential that one who was less than nothing should return to nothingness. By what right did such impotence breathe the noble mountain airs of Olympus? The sun, the rain, the sweet earth, the clement skies were for those who could outface the tempest. The dreadful dark water, which he feared so much, was drawing him. It was exercising an occult power upon him.

Almost involuntarily, almost without realizing his act, he began to climb out on to the parapet of the bridge. There was a faint vision of his aged father at the back of his thoughts, but now the rudderless vessel was caught by the forces of nature.

As with a mechanical reluctance his feet left the pavement of the bridge, the sight of the water caused him to shiver dismally. But the magnetism lurking in its dark, yet lustrous surface, was a hundred times more powerful than that will which was so inert in his flesh. It was ordained, however, that his feet should not descend to the parapet. For as they were still poised in mid-air, the first stroke of the hour came booming across the way from the cathedral.

It was a calm voice, before which even the darkness seemed to yield. In the same involuntary fashion in which he had climbed out on to the parapet, he returned to the security of the pavement. The sense of his destiny had been restored to him. He was again Achilles. Shuddering in every vein, he staggered through the mire of the roadway to the precincts of the national Valhalla, in which reposed the souls of heroes.

As in the days of his childhood he crept into this great cathedral. Again were his temples pressed to the chill flags; again he panted like a hunted deer. As he lay prostrate upon the stones of the sanctuary, a voice, lurking amid the dim columns, addressed him. "Zeus," it said, "will give us immortal ones the strength to fulfil our destiny."

It was late at night when the frail and haggard figure returned again to the little room. The aged man, his father, was still sitting at the table, with his faint eyes perusing the magic pages in which his profound faith was expressed.

"I will look at the page again, my father," said the young man, whose heart was no longer as water in his flesh.

To his infinite joy he saw that the writing, which formerly had not been apparent to his eyes, had now gained a visible embodiment.

"My eyes have grown bright again, my father," he cried. "And see, it is here written that if a miracle be desired, such as wish it must go forth personally in quest thereof."

"It is not wholly thus that I construe the page, O Achilles," said his father simply; "but then my eyes are those of one who is old."

"One day only is left to us now, my father," said the young man. "And although my fibres are as bread, to-morrow, come what may, I will go out to seek for the miracle."

XXXII

For the remainder of that night the young man committed himself to the much-dreaded darkness of the streets. He was endeavoring to harden his heart to seek for the miracle. And in the course of that day upon which he now entered the power was vouchsafed to him miraculously to obtain that which he sought.

William Jordan, Junior, presented himself at the counting-house of Crumpett and Hawker at the usual hour. Throughout the forenoon he performed his duties with that intense, but incompetent assiduity for which he had long been notorious. About twelve o'clock Mr. Walkinshaw summoned him to his table, and requested him to carry some papers to the room of Mr. Octavius Crumpett.

William Jordan proceeded to do this. Knocking at the closed door, he received the assurance from James Dodson who was ensconced near by, that Mr. Octavius had gone out. Thereupon the young man entered the empty room and placed the papers upon the table of his master.

In the act of so doing he beheld, with surprise and bewilderment, and with a start of horror, that

upon the table were two piles of gold pieces. With trembling fingers, yet with horror increasing its grip upon his heart, the young man took up the pieces of gold and proceeded to count them. With a sense of stupefaction the idea percolated slowly through his being that the miracle had happened. The pieces of gold were twenty in number, no more, and no less.

The miracle had come to pass. The presence of twenty gold pieces could have but one interpretation. It only remained for him to act. Muttering words of despair and terror, he placed the twenty pieces of gold in his pocket and left the room.

All through the afternoon William Jordan assiduously fulfilled his duties. Yet his whole being was enveloped in a kind of entrancement. He scarcely knew what he did or where he was.

When at last the hour came in which he was relieved from the labors of the day, he returned to the little room. Within him was the exultation of one who ascends the scaffold for an idea. The miracle had become consummated. In his pockets he bore twenty pieces of gold. The white hairs of his aged father would remain inviolate. Yet as soon as he crossed the threshold of the little room, he was met with the joyous eyes of the old man. A miracle had happened to him also.

It seemed that in the course of that eventful day an infrequent purchaser had made his appearance in the shop. And when he had come to examine

the musty old tomes upon the shelves, had discovered one among them for which he had paid the fabulous sum of three hundred pounds.

Therefore the little room was now doubly secure. Yet both these occurrences left the young man untouched by gratitude. Even that which made his father's eyes so radiant could not release his mind from the thrall of an indescribable torment which made it bleed. Better a thousand times to have lain in the streets of the great city, better a thousand times that his father and himself had been trampled lifeless by the relentless hordes of street-persons, than that he should have hardened his heart for the consummation of such a miracle as that.

As he paced the darkness that night in the throes of newer, and more sinister, and totally undreamt-of torments which his ill-starred attempt at action had imposed upon him, he could discern only one course to pursue. He must derive the power to make restitution.

Still, the mere act of restitution could not efface the deed. In whatever form he made amendment, there was still the foul stain that nothing could expunge. However, on the following morning, as he entered the counting-house of Crumpett and Hawker, the determination was strong within him to make all the reparation that lay within his power.

As he crossed the threshold of the outer office

he was surprised to see the undersized figure of James Dodson ascending the staircase, although the time was a full hour before his usual appearance at the office. His mentor looked back over his shoulder.

"Morning, Luney," he said in a rather forlorn manner, and passed on his way up the stairs.

William Jordan, in his bewilderment, in his strange self-amaze, in his dim uncertainty of the course of action he must now pursue, passed half-an-hour in the counting-house below. In that time he not only indulged in desperate, terrified self-intercourse, but, further, he sought the resolution to walk up stairs, to enter the room of his confiding master, and to restore that which he had stolen. The conviction was being slowly evolved in his heart that some ampler form of reparation was demanded of him, yet the precise shape it must assume was not as yet vouchsafed to him. At last, spurred by the knowledge that if he let the hour of action pass it could never return, he slowly ascended the stairs.

Stealthily he crept up them, hardly knowing why he was walking so softly. As he came noiselessly to his master's door, and proceeded to open it, it suddenly gave a loud creak. It was as if it sought to rebuke his unworthy fear that it should do so. Before the young man could enter the room his friend and mentor had come out of the room adjoining, and was standing at his side.

"Come in here," he said forlornly. "I was expecting you would give yourself away."

James Dodson led the way into his own small room, and as William Jordan entered he closed the door.

"I don't know what to say about it, Luney, I don't indeed," said Dodson dismally. "I have been thinking about it all night; and I don't seem to get any nearer towards the wise and the straight thing."

"I — I intend to make all the reparation that lies in my power," said the young man, whose face was that of a ghost.

"Yes; somehow I expected you would do that," said his mentor, "but if you do you will be found out."

"I think I would choose to have it so," said the young man, with gaunt eyes.

"No, my son," said his mentor firmly, "that is just what you can't afford. If you are found out there is no saying what will happen to you. You see Octavius is a very good chap; makes a god of what he calls honor, and so on, and that makes him a bit of a fanatic in some things. I really don't know where this would land you if you were found out. I've lied about it already; I am absolutely up to the neck in lies. I dare say he half suspects me; and in any case I am quite likely to lose my billet. But one thing he can't do, Luney, he can't bring it home to me. And now, my son,

we have got to take care that he doesn't bring it home to you."

"I — I think, Jimmy, the courage will be given to me to accept the entire responsibility of my action," said the young man.

"Well, you see," said James Dodson, with an odd look on his face, "you are such an extraordinary chap altogether, that I'm thinking the consequences might be too much for you. In any case you would have to go from here; and if you once go from here you will never get another billet — not as long as you live will you ever get another billet. And Octavius being, as I say, a bit of a fanatic in some things, it might even be worse for you than that."

"But," said William Jordan, "I — I think the power will be furnished to me to submit to the consequences of my action."

"I don't quite know what you mean," said James Dodson, "you have such an odd way of expressing yourself. But I am going to give you my advice in plain English. Mum is the word. I defy anything to be proved against you if you keep your mouth shut. If you do I won't deny that James Dodson may lose his billet. But in any case he has it about him to get another; while, as I say, if you come to lose yours you are done for altogether. No, Luney, whatever you do you must not appear in this. The consequences may be so much more than you know; and you are not a chap that can stand up against them. If you will

give the money to me I will restore it; but I shall use my own judgment as to how and when to put it back. You see I have already half persuaded Octavius that he has left the money somewhere else; that he has mislaid it, or that he has never had it. You see he is such an absent-minded sort of blighter, that by a bit of firm but judicious handling he might be persuaded that the money never existed. And I will do him this credit, my son; he would far rather it never had existed than that a thing like this should have happened in the house of Crumpett and Hawker."

The immediate result of this curious and unlooked-for intervention was that the unhappy young man, although declining to incriminate his mentor by handing the money over to him to be restored at his discretion, also refrained, for the time being, from replacing it himself, because such a course, in Jimmy Dodson's opinion, would tell heavily against himself.

"You see I've told such lies to Octavius," said Jimmy Dodson, "that he might easily come to believe that the money was not there at all. But if it returns to the exact spot where he thinks he left it, he will naturally come to suspect me as having some sort of a hand in it, and he will know then — like the d——d old fool that he is — that I have been trying to argue him clean out of his own reason."

"T-the p-power will be furnished to me to make

reparation," the young man muttered, "t-the p-power will be furnished to me to confess my crime."

"There must be none of that talk, my son," said his mentor sternly. "This is not a case for high falutin! It will not help at all. Either the money was there or it was not there. *I* believe it was not there; Octavius is going to believe so too. You see a chap like Octavius doesn't care a bit about the brass. It is the principle he cares about; and he is such a fanatic in some things, if he found you out there is no saying to what lengths he might go."

The frail barque, chartless, aimless in mid ocean, was obedient to the will of the wind. William Jordan crept again down the stairs, his resolution unfulfilled. The pieces of gold were still in his pocket; his crime was still unconfessed.

During the luncheon hour, as he sat in the empty counting-house, with his paper of bread-and-butter untouched, and his head buried in desolation in his weak and nerveless hands, he was startled back to sensibility by feeling a hand laid suddenly upon his shoulder. It was that of James Dodson. His mentor's forlorn aspect, of a few hours before, had yielded place to a kind of jubilation.

"What do you think, my son?" said this consummate man of action, "what do you think, old boy? I have positively persuaded that silly old cuckoo that he never left the money there at all."

William Jordan gave a gasp.

"I — I d-don't think it m-matters," he stammered.

"You don't think it matters!" said Jimmy Dodson, "why, my good Christian boy, you must be up the pole. Don't you realize what an escape it has been for us both? But I must have the devil's own tongue on me; if J. Dodson doesn't end his days with a peerage in Grosvenor Square, I don't know what two and two make, that's all. I never understood, until to-day, how easy it is to argue some chaps clean out of their own reason. I've always despised the old fool; but even I never realized what a nincompoop he was until this blessed morning. He arrived about ten, as he always does, and when he rang for me and I came in, I thought, 'Hullo, old friend, you look uncommonly sorry for yourself, you do.' Well, the old boy blew his nose very violently, and cocked his glass in his right eye very fiercely, and he bleated like a kid of three, 'Mr. Dodson, this affair is preying upon me. This great establishment was founded by my ancestor, Octavius Crumpett, in 1701. This house has published Dryden and Pope, Swift and Fielding, and all the foremost names in the literary history of this country until the present time. And I think, Mr. Dodson, I am justified in saying that an incident of this kind is quite without precedent in its annals. Such a reflection as is cast upon its personnel by this deplorable occurrence is — is, well Mr. Dodson,

more than I can contemplate.' And that is where I came in again, my son. 'Well, sir,' I said, 'you must forgive me if I repeat what I said yesterday afternoon, that you have not made it ab-so-lutely clear to my mind that the money was actually there. I don't know whether you have noticed it, sir, but what you might call hallucinations are constantly occurring. How often, sir, do we persuade ourselves that we have not done a thing when we have done it, and *vice versa*. And you'll pardon me, sir, but these scientific people say it is the same with disease. You can think you have got a disease until you get it; or, again, if you can persuade yourself you have not got a disease you have got, why, sir, in the course of time you find you have not got it after all.'

"Well now, my son, I could see I was pressing with both feet on the loud pedal. 'Mr. Dodson,' said the old mug, 'I would pay a thousand pounds to a charitable institution if I could really persuade myself that I did not leave that wretched money upon my table.' Well, after that, Luney, I went in to win. Since I buttered him up over his Homer — the d—— silliest production, I understand, that ever was perpetrated — he has always listened to me with what he calls 'respect.' He considers me 'a scholar and a gentleman'; he likes to consider everybody in this old-established house, from Pa to the ex-caretaker's widow, who feeds the cat, to be 'a scholar and a gentleman.' Well, I went

for the gloves; I gave him five minutes of regular John Bright, and wound up with a bit of dissertation on self-deception. And would you believe it, Luney, the silly old cormorant wrung me warmly by the hand, and said if only for his own peace of mind he must admit that he had deceived himself. The money could not possibly have been there; he must have left it in his hansom; it must have fallen from his pocket in Saint James Square; in fact, there must be a hideous mistake somewhere; on no account must I mention it in the office. I must treat all the circumstances exactly as though they had never occurred."

"Now what do you say to that, my son? Of course it was all pretty useful work on the part of J. D. You see I guessed from the first that like all these ultra-pious church-and-chapel coves he was forcing himself to swallow that which he knew he had no right to swallow; and in the end he was able to convince himself it was 'the right thing' to swallow it rather than to admit the cold-drawn truth."

To the surprise of the triumphant Mr. Dodson, this description of the further miracle that had been wrought in his favor brought no kind of relief to the unhappy William Jordan.

"T-there is still my shame," he muttered.

"You just put that out of your mind, my son," said the philosopher. "Throw the money down a drain, and pretend, like Octavius, that the whole

thing never occurred. Of course, if Octavius or any other of the ultra-pious sect were to overhear me, they would swear I was as guilty as you are. And so I am; I expect I am far the worse of the two. Because I don't call you guilty. You are odd, weak, you have a tile or two loose, but I could never look on a chap like you as having deliberate guile. And I mean to stand by you, although I don't know why I should. I have nothing to gain; in fact I have everything to lose by taking up with a chap like you. I don't recognize J. D., who intends to get on in the world, no matter what it costs him, in my dealings with you. But there they are. As I say, my son, you are against my principles altogether; but the fact remains, Luney, that since I have come to take up with you, I don't seem, somehow, as though I can let you go."

"I — I f-foresee the hour when you will have to deny me," said the young man, in his difficult speech.

"You must get out of this habit of being low-spirited," said James Dodson, to whom this speech was incoherent. "It might help to give you away. And I can't impress it upon you too strongly that if Octavius should ever come at the truth — kind-hearted old duffer as he is — he will be only too ready to do what he calls his duty. As for me, I say right here, that whatever you did, Luney, having known you so long, and having come to know you so well, James Dodson could never look upon

you as a wrong 'un. I'll tell you, my son, in what light I have come to regard you, although it has taken me years to come at the truth. You are one of those fine mathematical instruments which can register things that ordinary instruments know nothing about. You are no earthly use for straightforward, common, practical, two-and-two-makes-four sort of life, but it has begun to dawn on me lately, that you must have a wonderful mind for some things. It is only lately that I have begun to notice it. But now and then you seem to come out with something that is — well, that is downright marvelous for a chap like you. In odd out-of-the-way subjects, that are not a ha'porth of use to anybody, you have a knack of saying things that chaps like John Dobbs and Joe Cox can't even understand. My own private opinion is that you *can't* be such a fool as you seem. I believe, Luney, that you ought to be kept under a glass case in a box lined with felt, because the slightest thing, even a change in the weather, is enough to throw you off your balance."

Having thus delivered himself, and at an unexampled length, Mr. Dodson left his distracted friend to continue in that phase of remorse whose effect upon him was so dire.

Throughout the long hours of the afternoon the need for immediate action never left his mind. Already he had let the golden moment pass; every hour that followed would increase the likelihood that he would fail to derive the courage for his task.

Even his brave, but misguided, friend, whose counsels were so subtle and so specious, had come to seem in his power to put a gloss on the cruelest of temptations, to be neither more nor less than the embodiment of evil.

Worn out in mind and body he went back that evening to the little room. Yet here there was no surcease to be had. Wherever he carried his guilt he could find nought to assuage it. When he turned to the ancient authors their unceasing demand of Action, Action, Action seemed to make his vacillating weakness turn to a gangrene in his flesh. Yet was not this dreadful shibboleth of theirs the rock upon which the frail vessel had been shattered! With the modern authors he fared no better. Their cynicism became a callous mockery that had no power to heal. And when he turned to the Book of the Ages, his mind was colored by so dark a horror that he failed to decipher a single word inscribed upon its leaves. They were as so many red blurs void of form and meaning.

During the long hours of the night the aged man, his father, sat with the passage before him in which was expressed the deep truth that miracles would continue to happen to those who had the courage to be credulous.

"Tell me, my father," cried the young man at last in his despair, "what must happen to those who are too frail for action, too craven for belief?"

"Even these must fulfil their destiny, beloved one," said the white-haired man.

XXXIII

PALE with conflict William Jordan took himself yet again to No. 24 Trafalgar Square on the following day. He still carried in his pockets the twenty pieces of gold. His guilt was written in his mien, yet the little world about him could not read.

"Mr. Jordan," said Mr. W. P. Walkinshaw with great kindness, "it has seemed to me lately that all is not well with you. You have not been looking yourself. I would like to suggest that you take a fortnight's rest; I think I can answer for it that the firm will raise no objection. I would like to suggest that you run down to Margate to take a breath of the sea."

"You are k-kind, sir," said the young man, with the simplicity that the good Mr. Walkinshaw had long come to recognize as a part of him, "but my m-malady is of another nature."

Mr. Walkinshaw shook his head solemnly, and subsequently observed to Mr. Aristophanes Luff, "That young man is suffering. He ought to seek medical advice."

"One can imagine that Hamlet looked like that," mildly observed Mr. Aristophanes Luff.

As William Jordan sat on his high stool in the left-hand corner, he saw through the glass partition

that divided the counting-house from the exit into Trafalgar Square, Jimmy Dodson pass out of the door into the street. At the moment this apparently unrelated circumstance addressed his mind with no especial significance. But soon it began to produce a kind of vibration in it, as though it were charged with a meaning that his faculties had not the power to seize. Quite suddenly, however, the young man discarded the paper and string he was manipulating and came down from his high stool.

"Oh, yes," he muttered to himself softly, "I understand now, I understand now."

Again his limbs, in their weariness, mounted those well-remembered stairs. He passed the antechamber wherein his evil genius was wont to reside, but who, at this moment, all unconscious, was taking his way across the square. He tapped softly upon the door of the head of the firm. He entered silently but without vacillation.

Mr. Octavius Crumpett was reading, with an occasional chuckle of audible pleasure, the manuscript of the latest polite fiction of Sir Topman Murtle, K.C.B., "the Queen's favorite novelist," and his own cherished and familiar friend.

"What an insight that man has into the human heart," he kept exclaiming at intervals, as some uncommonly illuminating flash of intuition lighted his own sympathetic intelligence. At last this august gentleman chanced to pause in his labor of love. He looked up. And looking up he be-

held the outline of a silent figure standing at the far end of the room with its hand still on the door it had closed so softly.

"Good-morning, Mr.— er — er — er — dear me," said Mr. Octavius Crumpett.

How trying it was that he should actually fail to remember the name of one who rendered faithful service to that house! Really such an untoward incident had not occurred to the august gentleman for years. But in a sudden unmistakable ray of inspiration the name of the youthful clerk entered his mind.

"Good-morning, Mr. *Jordan*," said Mr. Octavius Crumpett, almost proudly, almost triumphantly.

At the sound of that amiable and pleasant voice the strange-looking young man came forward to the table, and taking a handful of gold pieces from his pockets, placed them in a heap upon the table before Mr. Octavius Crumpett's astonished gaze.

"I wish to submit myself, sir, to the consequences of my action," said the young man, in soft yet self-contained speech.

At first Mr. Octavius Crumpett was powerless to give expression to his bewildered astonishment. But slowly, solemnly, mournfully the manuscript pages of the polite fiction of his distinguished friend fluttered from his grasp; and placing the palms of his beautifully-kept hands, with their delicately-trimmed nails, together, he murmured, "This is calamitous!"

Minutes seemed to pass in which the head of the firm appeared to resign himself to the fervor of a moral trepidation, which was yet so chastened that its only outward manifestation was that of gentle sorrow.

"This is ineffably calamitous!" murmured Mr. Octavius Crumpett.

William Jordan stood placidly with his hands by his sides.

"I would have hailed the opportunity," said Mr. Octavius Crumpett, "of paying a *substantial* sum of money to a charitable institution had it been possible by that means to prevent such a thing happening to this house. Mr. Jordan, I feel I must ask you to have the kindness to go down-stairs for a short time, while I — ah, I — ah, earnestly deliberate as to the right course to adopt."

The young man bowed and withdrew. As he was passing out of the door, Mr. Octavius Crumpett said, "Do — ah, I understand, Mr. Jordan, that you have no palliation to offer, no words of contrition to express?"

"None, sir," said the young man. His voice was precise; his absence of gesture was that of a statue.

At the top of the stairs William Jordan encountered James Dodson, who was ascending them.

"My God, Luney, you must be mad!" cried his mentor, giving one half-tragic glance at the face of the young man.

William Jordan passed down the stairs as though he had neither seen nor heard him.

For a considerable time Mr. Octavius Crumpett meditated upon his course of action. He was a humane, enlightened, high-principled, liberal-minded gentleman; a notable product of that which a long-established society had achieved in the way of civilization. In respect and solicitude for his kind he yielded to none. But he was now face to face with the most sinister problem that a sheltered experience had ever been called upon to confront.

As he sat revolving the matter in his thoughts, he seemed to feel that sterner and more forcible clay was required to grapple with an issue so momentous. In his enlightened desire to keep abreast of the foremost practice upon the subject, he rang his bell and summoned one upon whom, whose youth and subordinate rank notwithstanding, he had already learned to lean.

"Mr. Dodson," said Mr. Octavius Crumpett, with unmistakable horror and distress in his kind brown eyes, "I was justified in my conjecture. The money was left upon the table; it was abstracted — and — and by one employed in this house."

Mr. Dodson stood in a solemnity that paid homage to the occasion.

"Mr. Dodson," said Mr. Octavius Crumpett, after a long pause, which was fraught with embarrassment for both gentlemen, "I find myself upon the horns of a dilemma. I desire to be just to this

great house whom a grave public scandal threatens; I desire to be just to my own humane feelings; yet above everything, Mr. Dodson, I feel that I ought to act in accordance with the best and latest modern opinion; in a word, Mr. Dodson, one is desirous of consulting the public welfare."

"I understand perfectly, sir," said Mr. Dodson, with an air of weight that engaged the respectful attention of his good and large-minded employer. "I understand *perfectly*, sir, the position in which you are placed. It's one of great delicacy. One of great delicacy. I may say, sir, it is one of the — ah, *greatest* possible delicacy. But if, sir, I might presume to speak ——"

By the decree of Fate, however, it was not given to Mr. Dodson to presume to speak, for at that moment the door was opened, and one scarcely less in distinction than Mr. Octavius Crumpett himself was announced. It was Sir Topman Murtle, K.C.B.

Mr. Dodson withdrew in a respectful silence, in which much was expressed.

The pen of the devout historian approaches warily and with awe the momentous task of delineating the outline of the Queen's favorite novelist. He was in his mature, full-blooded, middle period; the period of his most flamboyant successes; the period of the most memorable and appealing portraits. As they or their replicas adorn the walls of every self-respecting gallery in the United Kingdom, modeled upon Millais in his second manner, the faithful are

with confidence thereto referred. It is only necessary to say for the purposes of this biography that Sir Topman Murtle, K.C.B., was a small, stout, middle-aged gentleman of a consummate English type — the type that is found in England, and nowhere else. In point of attire he was no less prosperous than Mr. Octavius Crumpett himself. His manner was cordial yet consonant with true dignity; his fine bearing and white gaiters were pregnant of unmistakable distinction.

When these august personages had greeted one another with a cordial frankness that was very pleasant to witness, said Sir Topman Murtle, in a smooth, high-pitched voice, "Before we approach the subject of 'The Angel's Bride,' I should value your advice, my dear Crumpett, upon a subject which is giving me, at the present moment, some little concern. I feel myself to be on the horns of a dilemma."

The word "dilemma" touched a responsive chord in the bosom of Mr. Octavius Crumpett, M.A., D.C.L. (Oxon.).

"My dilemma is this, Crumpett," said his distinguished visitor. "It has recently been suggested to me by my friend, the Prime Minister, that I should allow myself to be nominated to the Privy Council."

"I congratulate you unreservedly, Murtle," said Mr. Octavius Crumpett, M.A., D.C.L. (Oxon.), with unfeigned emotion.

"But, Crumpett, the problem shapes itself in my mind," said Sir Topman Murtle, "will the acceptance of that which one is bound to consider as an undoubted honor, be wholly consistent with that reverence for the dignity of letters which I hope I don't exaggerate?"

"I am sure, Murtle," said Mr. Octavius Crumpett, with a conviction of singular depth, "one feels that whatever you did it would be impossible for you to degrade the position in the world of letters to which your talents have called you."

"I have a profound faith in your judgment, Crumpett," said Sir Topman Murtle, "I am always stimulated by your clearness of thought and your depth of conviction. But, in a manner of speaking, would it not be possible to betray the higher tenets of one's calling by giving one's assent to official recognition, however honorable and however greatly to be cherished by a private individual? You will remember that Carlyle refused a baronetcy?"

"No, Murtle," said Mr. Octavius Crumpett, with a conviction that seemed to grow deeper than ever, "there is not a shade of doubt in my mind that your sensitiveness upon this point is over-nice. Carlyle refused a baronetcy, but Scott accepted one; and Joseph Addison, one of the earliest names upon our books, accepted office in the government of his day."

"All the same, Crumpett," said Sir Topman Murtle, "I feel qualms."

"They are uncalled for, I assure you, Myrtle," said Mr. Octavius Crumpett, with splendid finality, "wholly uncalled for."

"One can hardly fancy the Right Honorable William Shakespeare, P.C.," said Sir Topman Murtle, with an air of grave perplexity.

"Had Shakespeare been an educated man," said Mr. Octavius Crumpett, thoughtfully balancing his paper-knife of solid silver on the point of his forefinger, "I believe it is generally recognized that there is no honor to which he might not have aspired. And let me say this, Murtle," continued Mr. Octavius Crumpett, warming to his theme with an energy of which few would have suspected him to be capable, "let me say this. It is due to your sense of the higher citizenship that such a one as yourself should allow the welfare of the public to be paramount."

"Ah, the public," said Sir Topman Murtle, "the public; upon my word for the moment I had nearly forgotten the public!"

"No representative man must ever forget what he owes to the public," said Mr. Octavius Crumpett, with a sententiousness in which he seldom permitted himself to indulge.

The impact of Mr. Octavius Crumpett's irresistible conviction began to have its effect on Sir Topman Murtle.

"Yes," said Sir Topman Murtle, "for the moment I had almost allowed myself to forget the public. It is a merciful thing, Crumpett, that you

recalled it to my mind in time. I agree with you that we ought not to allow a sentiment, which some might consider high-flown, to override a sense of duty."

"And now, Murtle," said Mr. Octavius Crumpett with gently heaving bosom, "I must expose the horns of my own dilemma."

With profound emotion the chief of the house of Crumpett and Hawker unfolded the tragic and sordid story.

"I am a humane man, Murtle, as I hope, and trust and believe," he concluded; "and I do not know how I could face anything in the nature of a scandal in regard to this house, but — but ——"

"Crumpett," said Sir Topman Murtle, "no one appreciates more fully than do I the painfulness of your position, but scruple may become vacillation, and vacillation may become weakness. Can it be possible, Crumpett, that you also are about to forget the duty you owe to the public?"

"No one has a profounder reverence, Murtle, than have I for those who make a practice of rendering unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's," said Mr. Octavius Crumpett, who, unhappy as he was, spoke with the humility of a Christian gentleman; "but — but the misguided young man restored the money himself, and I have every reason to believe it is his first deviation from the path of strict rectitude."

"Crumpett," said Sir Topman Murtle, placing

his own white and fleshy hand, whose finger-nails were carefully trimmed, upon the shoulder of his friend with a firmness that was remarkable, "your scruples do honor to your good heart, but I feel sure they are misplaced. Whatever it may cost you, you must discharge your duty to the State. That duty must necessarily be distasteful — to the sensitive mind it always is; but pray remember, Crumpett, that you will not be the only martyr to the inexorable cause of the public. And it has always seemed to me, Crumpett, that the greater the pain we incur in following a given course of action, the more imperative, the more sacred the need for that course of action becomes."

Mr. Octavius Crumpett heaved a profound sigh.

"Yes, Murtle," he said, with the meekness of one at the feet of Gamaliel, "you have worked out that beautiful idea in 'The Angel's Bride;' but really I would that this question were one that a stronger and wiser and more competent nature had to decide."

"The question, Crumpett, decides itself," said Sir Topman Murtle in a manner that seemed to imply that a stronger and wiser and more competent nature had already decided it.

And indeed, as Sir Topman Murtle said, the question did decide itself, for at this moment William Jordan, wearing his overcoat, and carrying his hat, entered the room. He was accompanied by a stalwart police constable.

"It is my wish, sir," said the young man, speak-

ing in a calm and clear voice, "to place myself in the hands of justice."

Mr. Octavius Crumpett heaved a sigh of relief. He, too, had passed through his mental crisis.

XXXIV

On the following morning, within the precincts of a stuffy, drab-colored, malodorous building, which was so seldom visited by daylight that the gas was already lit, Mr. Octavius Crumpett, looking grave and perturbed, accepted by the invitation of the presiding magistrate and a fellow-member of his club, one Mr. Ashmole Pursglove, C.B., Q.C., a seat on the bench.

The prisoner, worn and pale, was already standing in the dock. Below him was a solicitor engaged by Mr. James Dodson at the suggestion of Mr. Octavius Crumpett. Mr. Dodson himself was beside him. A close observer would have said that his own composure was considerably less than that of the accused.

The case was of such a trivial character that it was disposed of immediately. The accused, upon his own confession, was charged with abstracting the sum of twenty pounds, the property of his employer. The accused's solicitor spoke very earnestly as to the excellent character the prisoner had always borne; he had been seven years in the prosecutor's employ; and he insisted upon the fact that the theft would not have been brought to light had not the accused himself restored the money and confessed his action.

To this the prisoner's employer added an earnest request that the unfortunate young man be dealt with leniently, as he had given every satisfaction to the house of Crumpett and Hawker, and they had no desire whatever to press the case.

"William Jordan," said the magistrate, in the tone of a somewhat petulant male parent, "having regard to the fact that your employer, whose goodness of heart and philanthropy of disposition are well known, has himself interceded for you, and having regard also to the fact that since the commission of your act you appear to have done all in your power to repair it, I should be inclined to feel that the ends of justice would be met by a nominal sentence upon you. But unfortunately I learn that this is not the first occasion upon which you have been before this court; and as you have already enjoyed what I may say I am inclined to consider the questionable philanthropy of the First Offenders' Act, upon a charge similar to this present, although upon the former occasion it involved theft from the person, I now feel that I have no alternative but to deal with you in a salutary manner. William Jordan, you must go to hard labor for six months."

The young man stood erectly to receive this sentence. About his lips was a smile which was proud, humble, yet almost happy.

XXXV

After the prisoner had bowed with a self-possession and an ample courtesy to the presiding magistrate, and to his late employer — which both gentlemen thought in the circumstances were very remarkable — and he had stepped down from the dock, Mr. Octavius Crumpett said to his acquaintance and fellow-clubman, Mr. Ashmole Pursglove, "Pursglove, this affair has cost me much pain. That man has been in the counting-house of Crumpett and Hawker seven years, and I understand that in all that time his conduct has been exemplary. Yet his career reveals a depth of depravity that is truly shocking. Not one of his companions in the office had suspected it."

"I can only remark, Crumpett," said Mr. Ashmole Pursglove, "that in my judgment that man has the air and demeanor of a finished criminal. I am afraid there is nothing to be said for a man of that type. Our social system makes no sort of provision for him. If I could have my way he would be detained as a hopeless lunatic. He would not be given back to society again."

"It is curious, Pursglove," said Mr. Octavius Crumpett, "what an insight into the human heart is given to some men. You know Murtle. Well,

Murtle said to me, after having witnessed the man give himself into custody, 'There is not the least doubt in my mind, Crumpett, that that man is capable of anything.' And I little thought when Murtle said this, upon, as I considered, very insufficient data, how amply his judgment was to be confirmed."

After Mr. Octavius Crumpett had shaken hands very cordially with the presiding magistrate, had also thanked him for his disinterested services, and further, had subscribed five pounds to the funds of the court, he entered a hansom and requested to be driven to his club. In the course of the journey he continually made the observation: "Murtle was right! Murtle was quite right! What an astonishing insight that man has into the human heart!"

XXXVI

In the meantime Mr. James Dodson had hurriedly left the precincts of the court. He had made his way headlong to the refreshment buffet of the Brontë Hotel.

"Chrissie," said the eminent philosopher, "I want something that in the quickest possible time will make me blind to the world. And as soon as I am blind to the world I want you to put me in a cab and send me home."

"What's up, Jimmy?" said the lady at the buffet, betraying a lively curiosity. "It isn't love, because I know by experience that you are not built in that way."

"A lot you know about it," said the philosopher hoarsely. "You think because you have thrown me over twice and I have not said a word about it, I haven't got any feelings at all. You are wrong, Chrissie. If you touch me in the right spot I have to squeal just like anybody else. I want to knock my head against that beer-engine until I can't feel anything more. And why do you think I want to do that?"

"Ask me another, James Dodson," said the siren. "But for whatever reason you want to do it, I know very well it is not love."

"Well, if it is not love," said Mr. Dodson, "I don't know what the name is for it. Here is a chap I have known seven years, who was nothing to me at first, who was not the kind of chap a fellow like me would take up with, who has been found guilty of doing things — not one thing mind you, but two — and although he has been found guilty, I say — and he owns up himself — and he has just been put away for six months' hard labor — the whole business makes me feel — makes me feel, Chrissie, as though I want to commit a murder."

"Whatever you do, Jimmie," said the siren, who was genuinely alarmed, "you must keep off brandy. You are absolutely off the square. I can't make out what is the matter with you; I should have said you would have been the last chap in the world to let go like this."

"So should I, old girl," said Mr. Dodson. "I don't recognize J.D. in this affair at all. The fact is, J.D. never has recognized himself in his dealings with that poor lunatic. But there has come to be something about that chap that is more to me than my own flesh and blood. If it isn't love I don't know what it is; yet why it should be love I don't know. As you know, old girl, I don't believe much in religion as a general thing, but it has seemed to me lately that that chap was just a saint in disguise. And now they have taken him from me — put him away in jail — to hard labor — and he deserves it too — and — and, old girl, it has kind of

knocked the bottom out of my little world altogether — and — and I feel that I shall never be able to believe in anything again."

"Steady, old boy," said Chrissie with an ample yet robust sympathy. "I don't like to see you let go."

"I don't like it, either," said the philosopher whitely. "But I feel just now that I must either let out a little or go mad. One thing is dead sure; I mustn't go back to the office at present. If I do I am certain to murder Octavius."

"Jimmy," said Chrissie, with matronly reserve from behind the buffet, "if you like to bring that ring back again to-morrow I'll wear it."

"You give me something that will put me to sleep," said the philosopher hoarsely and with wild eyes. "Anything — I don't care what — as long as it does it soon."

XXXVII

One misty but pleasant morning of the early autumn, a four-wheeled cab was drawn up against the curb immediately opposite the portals of a London penitentiary. A wizened and undersized young man with black hair, a short bristling moustache, and his hands in his pockets, stood with his back to this vehicle. Upon his not particularly agreeable countenance was a curious air of expectancy.

Ever and anon the young man might have been seen to take out his watch. By the manner in which he regarded it, it was to be surmised that he was growing impatient. He began to pace up and down the pavement in front of the prison. Already he had been waiting more than an hour. It began to seem that he whom he awaited would never appear.

At last there stepped through the sombre portals of the jail an extremely slight figure, rather above than below the middle height. It was that of a young man. His hands were remarkably slender and delicate; his eyes were large and deep yet extraordinarily luminous; his hair was shaved close to his head. The tardy beams of the sun which were beginning to creep over the great city declared his gaunt face to be suffused by a somewhat curious

pallor. In the centre of the right cheek was a slight yet almost hideous natural disfigurement.

Scarcely had this fragile figure emerged from the portals of the jail, than the wizened and undersized young man, who had been pacing the flags of the pavement for some little time past, turned and beheld it. At once he made towards him. Quite suddenly, however, he stopped, as if in the throes of a profound bewilderment. An expression of pain and confusion overspread his face.

In the next moment, however, he had gone forward again. It was as though an irresistible impulse had driven him.

"Why — why," he said, peering into the great and luminous eyes of the man who had issued from the portals of the jail, "can — can it be Luney?"

He who was addressed in this singular manner replied by taking a hand of the speaker's in each of his own, and by saluting him upon the forehead.

XXXVIII

When he had ensconced William Jordan in the interior of the cab Mr. James Dodson before entering the vehicle himself turned to the man on the box.

"Cabby," he said, "as it is a nice morning you can just throw back the flaps of your machine and take us for a drive round Brixton."

The cabman interpreted these instructions by uncovering the roof of the vehicle, and by driving away from the penitentiary at a regulated pace.

Its two occupants were seated side by side.

"Why, Luney," said Jimmy Dodson in a voice of bewilderment, "I hardly knew you."

"Is it surprising?" said his companion.

"And your voice," said Jimmy Dodson, "I hardly recognize your voice as belonging to you either. Something seems to have happened to you."

"As you say," said William Jordan softly, "something seems to have happened to me; but," he added as he laid his delicate fingers upon those of his friend, "I can never forget those to whom I owe everything."

Dodson already felt a curious susceptibility to the new and strange manner of his companion.

"But, you know, old boy," said Jimmy Dodson, whose joy in their meeting was suddenly tempered

by the things that were, "all this must be kept from my people all the same. You see, my father — well, my father is in the Force, and — and, well naturally, it would not be professional. And of course you are done for socially — it is no use my disguising it, is it, old boy? It is only kindness to tell you. And I should be done for socially too if any of my set knew that I had taken up with you again. And I should get sacked from the office — my screw is now three hundred a year — and of course nobody would be to blame but myself. I suppose my taking up with you again is all very weak and wrong; yet if I must tell you the truth, Luney, I have come to feel that I would rather not go on living if I have to do without you."

The last few sentences of Jimmy Dodson's remarkable speech, the whole of which was uttered in a very rapid, mumbling, somewhat incoherent fashion, far other than the one he was wont to affect, caused a poignant expression to flit through the large and bright eyes of William Jordan.

"I have no counsel to give you, Jimmy," he said. "I can only leave you to go out alone into the wilderness."

Jimmy Dodson looked at his friend with wonder and bewilderment, taking a firmer hold upon him.

"Luney," he said, "I can't think what has happened to you. But somehow, as I say, you are not the same. Your looks are so different — you have no idea how wide and bright your eyes are. And

your speech is different — it is so much clearer and stronger, and you don't seem to stammer at all. But you were always beyond me, old boy, and now you seem to have got farther and farther away."

"Yet never was I so near to you, Jimmy, as I am this day," said William Jordan. "You are no longer a street-person, nor an Olympian, nor one of other race and texture. You are just yourself, your own baffled, bewildered, arrested self — my own half-developed younger brother who one day may come to flower."

"I don't understand you, Luney," said his mentor, "you have altered so much that I don't understand you at all. And yet, when I hear your voice and I look at your eyes, you make me feel somehow ——"

XXXIX

When William Jordan returned again to the little room his father greeted him in silence. The aged man whose hair was now snow-white, whose eyes were dim, whose limbs were enfeebled, looked upon the returned wayfarer without speech and without question.

"I observe, my father," said the young man, peering into the failing eyes, "that you were of good faith."

"I had your assurance, Achilles, that you would return," said the aged man.

"You have no curiosity, my father," said the young man. "You do not ask whether my journeyings, like those of Odysseus of old, were fraught with hazard and great vicissitude."

"With that measure of sight that still remains to me, beloved one," said his father, "I observe that to be the case."

The young man smiled with a kind of submission.

"I am entered upon the third phase," he said, "the third and the last. The time is brief. I hear already the first faint lappings of the waters of oblivion in my ears. But I have acquired a store of knowledge. I went out in anguish and bewilderment; I return in self-security. If only the strength

be given to my right hand in these last days I shall commence author."

"Will you write in the book, beloved one?" said the old man, whose enfeebled frame had now scarce the power to lift the great volume from the shelf.

The young man looked the pages through with a patient scrutiny.

"There are many blank pages," he said. "There are many to be filled."

"Their number is infinite," said the old man. "As long as our dynasty continues there will always be a page to be filled."

"Yet he who fails to write therein," said the young man, "places a term to the dynasty, does he not, my father?"

"Verily, beloved," said his father, "it is written so."

"I must go out into the wilderness again, my father," said the young man with the new glamor in his large bright eyes. "It may then be given to me to write in the book."

From this day forth the young man spent his outdoor hours in many and strange places, without pain, without trepidation, without his previous hurry of the spirit. He walked fearlessly among the crowded streets, reading the faces of those he found therein. Sometimes he would go afield and enter the country lanes and the woodland places and read the face of Nature.

Under the cover of the darkness his friend Dod-

son would sometimes tap upon the shutters of the shop. The young man would immediately leave his books, for he had returned to those companions of his early days, and would go forth with his friend into the streets of the great city. On the side of each there was an odd fear: James Dodson would never venture abroad upon these excursions without turning up his coat collar and pulling down his hat over his eyes, and he earnestly besought William Jordan to follow his example.

"If it leaks out that we still walk out together," said Jimmy Dodson, "I am done for socially, and I shall lose my three hundred a year."

On the other hand William Jordan's constant fear was lest his friend in a moment of unguarded impetuosity should pass through the shop and penetrate over the threshold of the little room.

"Jimmy," he said, with that directness of speech which was his recent possession, "I would urge upon you never to pass beyond the threshold of the little room in which I and my father dwell, until that hour should come wherein you are told to enter."

"I promise, old boy," said Jimmy Dodson assenting readily, "and I ask you not to breathe it to a living soul that we still walk out together. Really I don't know why we do. I seem to be taking my life in my hand, yet I feel as though I haven't the power to help myself. The fact is I can't do without you, Luney."

However the time was at hand when these even-

ing excursions were much curtailed. In the course of his daily wanderings abroad, the young man in his new and high courage, found himself on one occasion in a dreadful slum in the eastern part of the great city. Once before in the early days of his childhood when, holding the hand of his father, he was wont to go forth to seek knowledge, he had found himself in this dismal place. And such was the terror it aroused in him that his dreams were haunted for many nights. But this day he traversed these regions, which he had never thought to dare to enter again, calmly, fearlessly and alone.

And in the middle of the most noisome part of the slum, he observed a stalwart man in a shabby black coat, and a very old hat, and trousers frayed at the end, and ugly and misshapen shoes with their strings hanging loose, talking to two ragged and filthy urchins whose bare legs were plastered with mud, who were revelling in the gutter.

The young man stood a little apart watching these three until the boys went away, and then he approached the man and said as he took off his hat: "I beg your pardon, sir, but I would like to help you in your labors. I would like to instruct those children in reading and writing, and in other simple arts in which they seem to be deficient."

The man was frankly pleased by this address.

"Come to-night to the mission at half-past eight," he said brusquely, "and we will find work for your hands. See, there is the mission." He pointed

across the street to a grimy building of mean exterior, with a lamp over the door.

Accompanied by James Dodson, who left him at the door, the young man came to the mission at half-past eight that evening. Thenceforward every night of the week, he came there at the same hour and in the same company. At the end of a month, the stalwart man, who was somewhat grim of aspect, and rather rough of manner, and who was spoken of as "The Boss," said: "I don't know whether you are aware of it, Jordan, but already you have made a difference to us. We other fellows will be getting jealous. You have something that has been given to none of us."

"I think it is," said William Jordan, "that I am come among my own people." And he added wistfully, "I would that the time was not so brief."

In the little room he was now saying to his father constantly, "My knowledge has such increase, my father, that now it begins to bear upon me. If only the strength were given to my right hand I would commence author immediately." And sometimes he would add almost with petulance, "This delay begins to press upon me like a stone. The time is so brief."

At this period he seemed to have journeyed far from the high-wrought excitement and terror which had made his early years so dark. As he said to his father one day: "I walk now upon the seas and the mountains. I live by the light of the sun."

Yet now and again the excitements of his former days would return upon him, not perhaps in the same degree, but in such a manner as to shake and wear a frame which every day appeared to grow more frail.

One evening when he returned from the mission the fever of his youth seemed to be burning in his veins. His pallor was intense; his eyes had never looked so eerie in their lustre.

"My father," he said in a strange voice, and his gaunt form quivered like gossamer; "to-night I looked upon my mother's face."

His father peered at him with eyes of almost horrified perplexity.

"I saw," said the young man, "a wretched unhappy woman, all bent and bedraggled, creep from a gutter, and pass through a narrow and filthy alley leading to the darkest of the slums."

His father's bewilderment changed to an expression of singular poignancy.

"Do you ask, Achilles, for the history of your birth?" he said.

"Yes, my father," said the young man. "I will hear that wonderful story. Perchance it may help me to inscribe my page in the book."

His father took the hands of the young man within his own.

"It happened, O Achilles," said his father, "that I was sitting in this little room one bitterly inclement winter's night, in which the rain and sleet came

down in a flood, and I was reading that page in the book wherein it says we are to cherish the weak, when I heard a faint knocking upon the shutters of the shop. It was a very late hour, yet I went forth to open the door; and a poor ragged woman, all bedraggled and unkempt, and with great eyes haunted by fear, flung herself upon my kindness, crying that she was faint with hunger and that she had not known food and security all that day.

"I allowed her to enter the shop; but in a moment of unwariness, in the excitement that her strange coming had provoked in my veins, I turned and entered this little room to procure a box of matches to obtain a light, never dreaming that so poor a creature would have the temerity to follow upon my steps. But as I took the box of matches off the chimney-piece where, as you know, they are always kept, and as I turned again, I beheld to my horror and consternation that the poor creature had entered the room.

"There was only one thing then that I could do, Achilles; it was to permit her to sit and eat and learn the warmth of this little hearth. And no sooner had she done this than she fell asleep, and leaned her youthful head upon this little table, which for so many years has supported the burden of the mighty book. And as she lay there, Achilles, sleeping the grateful sleep of weariness, her breathing presence appeared to expand the walls of this small apartment, and as I looked again into the book, full many a page

which previously had had no purport, gave up its secret to my bewildered eyes.

"It was not until it was broad noon that the poor creature awoke, and she said in almost the voice of a small child, 'I like this little room of yours; it is a sweet and pleasant room; I think I will stay in it for ever.'

"'This room can have only one occupant,' I said to the woman.

"'It is so nice,' she said, speaking in the strange tongue which you have heard in the streets of the great city, 'it is so nice.' Yet she shivered so dismally that I was driven again to the Book.

"And from one of the pages that had been newly revealed to me, I saw that he who would write in the book must first continue the dynasty; and he who would continue the dynasty must not live to himself.

"Now, Achilles, already the passion had been long in my veins to write in the book of my fathers, where all the primal wisdom of the ages had been garnered; and as it was revealed suddenly to my gaze in what manner I must equip myself for the task, I let the woman stay.

"For a whole year the delicate and youthful creature stayed in this little room; yet all through those wonderful months her great eyes were ever haunted by fear. Sometimes in the midnight hours she would listen there against the shutters, as so many times, Achilles, you have also listened, at the wind

in the chimneys and the great roar of London, and she would say in a voice that thrilled with terror, yet half-choked by the beatings of her heart, 'I am thinking of that night in which the streets of the great city will call to me. For I was born in the streets of the great city, and my blood must ever obey their cry.'

"To myself, Achilles, that year in which the woman remained with me in the little room was crowded with an experience that was rich and rare, which my mind, widely furnished as it was with the ancient and modern authors, and fortified also with the infinite wisdom of the Book of the Ages, had never known before. But as the months passed, and the delicate and frail creature grew beautiful in my sight — so beautiful that I would pray sometimes that I might die before her beauty faded — I began to understand that it was not in the power even of this little room of ours to retain the possession of a thing so exquisite.

"I would lie with her all night with her hand in mine, fearful lest all unknown to me she should hear the cry of the streets in the never-ceasing voice of the great city, and that I should awake in the morning and find her gone. And many times did I turn to the Book for solace and counsel; and the Book declared that he who would retain his treasure must first write his page therein.

"Now although I kept my knees unceasingly to the floor of this little room, polished smooth by

many kneelings, it was not given to me to write in the Book. And the fear mounted in my heart that when the streets of the great city uttered their cry, this little room would not be able to resist it. And the frail and delicate creature knew it also; for she would sit there in that old chair in which you, my beloved Achilles, have been wont to sit so long at the ancient authors, and I have seen the grey tears course down her thin and pale cheeks. 'The cry of the streets of the great city will soon be heard now,' she would say mournfully, 'it may summon me at any moment now.'

"As her time came near, in my despair and my anguish I took a vainglorious vow. I swore upon the Book of the Ages that my child should be born here in this little room. Night and day I kept vigil over the frail and beautiful form, lest it should be spirited away with that cry which it could not resist. As each new day seemed about to herald the pangs of her labor, only to postpone them ere it was out, I sought by all the means in my power not to fail for a single instant in my vigil. I took potent drugs to banish sleep from my eyes. For I came to know that the instant sleep overpowered me, the streets of the great city would utter their cry.

"And so it was. For more than a week had I with my frantic vigilance kept my weariness at bay, when one night as I was still conning the Book for the sustenance in which I had never stood in such dire need, and the frail, unhappy creature sat there

in the chair weeping softly, with her eyes haunted by an ever-deepening terror, she cried out despairingly, 'Hark, I hear the voice of the streets rising above the roar of the great city. I must go, I must go; I can never bear a man-child in this little room of yours. It is written in my heart that I must bear it in the streets.'

"The wildly terrified creature rose from the chair. Her eyes were such that I dared not look upon.

"'The streets are calling to me,' she wailed piteously. 'I must bear my man-child in the streets of the great city.'

"And as I rose to take her in my arms, and to withhold her by main force from her purpose, for her slender fingers were already upon the door, I was overcome by the decree of nature. Stupefied by the fatigues of many days, I sank back in my chair, with my head sunk upon the open pages of the Book, asleep.

"When I awoke the sun was high in the heavens of a bright and beautiful winter's day. There was a thick mantle of snow on the tiles and the chimney-stacks, and the untrodden pavement of the little yard without the door. I found myself to be shivering in every limb; the fire had passed many hours from the grate in the little room; but the chill that was upon everything was as nought to that which bound the strings of my heart. For the unhappy creature had gone forth into the snow of the streets

of the great city, so that her man-child might there be born.

"I never looked to see her again, for when I turned to the Book of the Ages I found it written therein that I should not do so. But further it exhorted me to be jealous of my man-child, for it was written therein that he would be one of the great ones of the earth.

"And so hour by hour I went out to search the streets of the great city for that which had been born to me, but for many days my labor was vain. Yet once, as I returned at midnight from my fruitless search, dejected in mind and weary in limb, my feet touched a soft bundle that had been deposited upon the threshold of the shop. You, Achilles, were that bundle, but it has never been given to me to look again upon her that bore you."

The young man listened to the story of his birth with the calm passiveness which is the crown of great knowledge. He yielded to none of the emotions that so strange a recital was likely to arouse. When it was at an end he said softly, "I think you have done well, my father, to defer the recital of my birth until I have entered upon my third phase. Much that had otherwise been dark now stands revealed."

"I would cherish the assurance from your lips," said the white-haired man, with a look piteous to behold, "that I have done well to reveal this history unto you. Can you forgive, my brave son, the frail and blind agent of Destiny?"

With a swiftness of answer that caused the eyes of the old man to brim with tears, the young man took him to his bosom.

"This is indeed Achilles," said the aged man, "this is indeed Achilles. And yet — and yet, although this is he whom I begot, it has not been given to me to write my page in the Book."

"And should you fail to write your page in the Book, my father," said the young man, "is it not that our dynasty is at an end?"

"It is written so," said his father.

The young man stood with bowed head and close lips.

"I read your thought, valiant one," said the old man, with a dull anguish in his eyes.

"Perchance it is not my final thought," said the young man. "I am not yet through the third phase."

XL

As the days passed all too soon, the young man's former sense of the need for action returned upon him.

"The minutes melt," he was saying constantly, "yet the strength has not yet been given to my right hand."

Once he cried to his father, almost in despair, "Soon my veins will open and the life within me will melt, and yet my labors are scarcely begun. I have already gathered rare and great knowledge for my authorship, yet alas! I cannot lift the pen."

"In this matter, I am barren of all counsel," said his father, "for my right hand also, although nurtured in wisdom, has never received the strength to grasp the pen."

"The swift minutes speed headlong away," cried the young man anxiously, "yet I tarry over-long upon my path."

Day by day the dire need of achieving his destiny burned in his veins. Yet the fleet hours sped, and his mighty task was no nearer to fulfillment. All day he would traverse the streets of the great city, and when the evening came he would labor in its slums. But at last the spring of the year came again, and the sky grew more clement, and the trees

and the earth began to shine with green, a new passion came upon this laborer even as he toiled.

It happened that one evening, just as the fœtid little mission-room had been cleared for the night, the young man turned abruptly to his co-worker, that stalwart, the sight of whom had first drawn him there.

"Farewell, my kind friend," he said, "I pass from among you to-night."

"My dear Jordan," said his fellow-worker, "you will be wise to refrain from working among us for a while. You are one who burns the candle too freely. You will do well to learn to husband your strength."

"In order," said William Jordan, with his secret and beautiful smile, which many had learned to watch for, but none to understand, "that I may achieve that which lies before me?"

"That is true," said the chief of the mission. "You must know that you are a worker of miracles in this parish."

"And yet," said William Jordan, "this is the last time the worker of miracles can enter this parish of yours."

His stalwart and somewhat grim companion seemed to stagger at these words.

"Why — why, Jordan," he said, "does this mean that you are going to desert us altogether?"

"I fear so," said William Jordan. "To-night as

I sat among you I heard a voice in my ears. To-morrow at dawn I go upon my way."

"But, Jordan," said his fellow-worker, "I beg you, I beseech you to return to us. We cannot part from you; we cannot do without you down here."

"Alas!" said William Jordan, "I heard the voice as I worked among you to-night. A term has been placed to my days; it has almost expired; and yet my destiny is only half complete."

The chief of the mission took the frail hands of the young man in the grip of a giant.

"We cannot possibly let you go from among us," he said sternly. "We shall not; we need you; we need you. You have a touch of the magic; you are a born evangelist; you go into regions where none can follow."

"Nature has spoken," said William Jordan softly. "At dawn I obey her decree."

"No, no, no!" cried his comrade, "your work lies here. You were born for this. Nature formed you to labor for your kind; and you must labor for them all your days."

"You speak truly," said William Jordan, "but then my labors are not yet begun."

"Are not these your labors?" cried his fellow-worker. "Can you not wield your power upon those whom we others know not how to approach? Have you not worked wonders among us during the few short months in which you have labored?"

"Wonders," said William Jordan, with a tender melancholy in his voice, "can you tell me what are these wonders in comparison with those that I have still to perform?"

"I do not understand you, I do not follow you," said the other.

"No," said William Jordan, "you do not understand, yet perhaps it is well."

"But I swear to heaven," cried his fellow-worker, with hoarse passion, "you shall not go from among us like this."

The passion of this stalwart man was such that all unthinkingly he seized the frail form of the young man, and in the might of his conviction shook it fiercely.

Immediately William Jordan, for the first time in that place, was attacked by a violent frenzy of coughing. A spray of bright red blood was cast upon his lips. He spat it upon the floor.

His fellow-worker recoiled from the sight of it with a cry of dismay.

"Arterial blood," he gasped.

"Nature's mandate," said the young man, with his secret and beautiful smile.

His fellow-worker in the noble prime of his manhood, gave a low cry and sank back against the wall of the room.

"Oh," he cried wildly, pressing his hands across his heart, "I wish now you had never come among us at all!"

XLI

Outside the mission-hall in the gently-raining April night, James Dodson, with his coat-collar turned up over his ears and his hat pulled down over his eyes, lay in waiting for his friend. Upon beholding this woe-begone figure William Jordan gave a start of surprise.

"Why, Jimmy," he said, "why do you come here now?"

"As I was half-way through the performance at the Alcazar," said Jimmy Dodson apprehensively, "I had a sort of presentiment. Something seemed to tell me, Luney, that after to-night I might never see you again. Something seemed to tell me that you were going away."

"Nature has certainly spoken to me," said William Jordan.

"That doesn't mean, Luney, old boy," said Jimmy Dodson in a voice not the least like his own, "that you intend to desert an old friend?"

"To-morrow at dawn I obey her decree," said William Jordan.

"You don't mean to say you are going away!" cried Jimmy Dodson.

"Yes — for a little while."

"But — but," said Jimmy Dodson, "I don't think

I could bear it if you were never to come back. You see, Luney, old boy — well, you see — well, somehow, I can't explain it — *but* — *if* — *you* — *were* — *never* — *to* — *come* — *back!*"

The voice of Jimmy Dodson was slow-drawn like a wail. It pierced William Jordan to the heart. Tears leaped to the eyes of the young man, but in the darkness his stricken companion could not see them.

"Luney," said Jimmy Dodson, "will you promise that you will come back?"

"I promise," said the young man.

"Honor bright, you know, honest Injun," said Dodson anxiously.

"Honest Injun, Jimmy," said William Jordan, with a strange smile in his eyes.

"Give me your hand on it, old boy," said Jimmy Dodson; "although I am sure you wouldn't play it low down on an old pal."

William Jordan yielded to his friend's importunity.

Dodson shuddered.

"Why, old boy," he said, "it is so cold — so cold. Ugh, it is like ice."

William Jordan kissed his friend in the darkness.

"And — and," cried Dodson, "your lips burn like a fire."

The two friends walked along in a silence. After they had proceeded a long distance in this fashion through the wet midnight streets, the thin and high-

strung tones of Jimmy Dodson were heard again in the darkness.

"Luney," he said in a voice that seemed to overtax his powers of utterance, "I always used to wonder what made me take up with a chap like you; but since you came out of prison I have done nothing but wonder what made you take up with a chap like me."

"You are one of the links in the chain," said William Jordan, "one of the stages in the journey."

"I don't understand you at all," said Jimmy Dodson.

"Perhaps it is well," said William Jordan.

"And yet you know, old boy," said Jimmy Dodson, "when I first knew you, I didn't understand you then. But I always accounted for it by the fact that you were not quite all there. Well, I don't understand you a bit better now, although I have come now to account for it by the fact that I am not quite all there. I don't know why I have come round towards you like I have. At first I thought you were rather less than the ordinary, and that you didn't count at all; but now I consider you to be the finest chap I've ever known, and that you have got something about you that more than makes up for what you lack."

"May you not have entered upon another phase?" said William Jordan.

"I don't quite know what you mean, old boy," said Jimmy Dodson, "unless you mean that I've

changed. At least I had that kind of thought as I sat this evening at the Alcazar. The wrestling bored me, the songs were rotten, and I didn't think much of the ballet. And I thought the band was out of tune — all except John Dobbs. In fact, I began to wonder why I came. And then suddenly I thought of that night, old boy, when you sat at my side, and I took you round to see Hermione ——"

"Ah, the goddess!" exclaimed William Jordan softly.

"I have often thought since," said his friend, "that it was not right to play it on you as we did. And what Hermione said about you afterwards, old boy, rather turned me against her. But she was pretty low down, was Hermione; yes, she doesn't dance in the ballet now-a-days. All the same she rather knocked you, old boy, didn't she?"

"I thought her to be divine," said William Jordan simply.

The two friends stayed their steps under a flickering gas-lamp in the city. The steady rain continued. The clock of a neighboring church told the hour.

"It will be a long and wet walk to Peckham, Jimmy," said William Jordan.

"It will, old boy," said his friend, "but what do you suppose I care, now that you have given me your promise to come back. By the way, old boy, do you think it would be asking too much, as a special favor, for you to write me a line now and then just to say that you are alive."

The gaze of William Jordan grew heavy with a darkness that was veiled from his friend.

"You must forgive me, Jimmy, if I don't," he said.

"As a special favor," pleaded his friend. "You know, old boy, I have never had a line of yours. I have always been meaning to ask you for your autograph — that is before the trouble came — and — and now the trouble has come I intend to ask you for it. Send me a line, old boy, to say you are alive."

"I cannot promise to do that," said William Jordan, "because the strength has not yet been given to my right hand. But I do promise to return; and when I do return I shall listen for your tap upon the shutters; and then I will let you in as far as the threshold of the little room."

The friends said their last farewells as the clocks chimed the hour of two.

XLII

When in the middle of the night, William Jordan regained the little room, he found the aged man, his father, seated there. The Book was on the table open. The dagger, the chalice, and the stylus were also displayed. But in the face of the aged man was the mute despair which was ever upon it when these articles came to be brought forth.

The chalice was half-full of the red blood; the quill was dipped therein and held in the hand. But not a stroke had been committed to the virgin page of vellum.

"Will it never be done?" said the old man tremulously, "will it never be accomplished? Answer me, Achilles."

"I know not, my father," said the young man. "I am not so learned in the Book as I once was."

"Yet our knowledge of the Book increases with our years and our stature," said the old man, as if in amazement. "Answer me, Achilles, is it not so?"

"Yes and no," said the young man. "The Book of the Ages, my father, is an expression of the invisible forces of nature. And I am unfit to discourse thereupon until I have spoken with my mother the Earth, who is wise and of their kin. As my veins rapidly devour this third and last phase upon

which I am entered, they draw me nearer and nearer to her. Never have I been so near to her as I am to-night. As soon as the bright east announces the dawn I go to lie at the soft brown bosom of my mother. If she will give suck to the first of her children, perhaps it may be that the strength will come into his right hand."

As the young man spoke these words, he walked to the window of the little room and drew back the shutters.

"I see a faint light in the east," he said, with a subdued excitement. "The hour is at hand when I go upon my way."

"You will return, O Achilles?" said his aged father apprehensively, "I am lonely and my hairs are white."

"Yes, my father, I will return," said William Jordan, "I will return to our little room. When I have gone out and lain at the breasts of my mother the Earth; and I have walked in her wildernesses, and I have traversed her seas, and I have surprised the last of her secrets, which may be no secrets at all, I will return, my father, to our little room."

"That is well, beloved one," said the aged man, pressing his pale lips to the forehead of the young man.

Yet in the emotion generated by his words of farewell, the young man was seized again with a paroxysm.

"What — what do I see upon your lips, Achilles!"

cried the aged man, his father, peering with a curious horror in his dim eyes.

"Nature's mandate, my father," said the young man, with his secret and beautiful smile.

XLIII

As William Jordan went forth of the little room and took his way, the east had still no more than a few faint grey flecks, which were hardly more than vaunt-couriers of the hues of dawn. Into the ruck of the streets he took his way. He plunged into them headlong, without calculation, without attempting to discriminate. Yet there was neither hurry of the flesh nor of the spirit; both were rational, temperate, responsible.

The rain had ceased; but the black pavements were slippery and unwholesome, and there was the stench of a thousand drains. Street after street he passed through at the same regulated pace, which was neither slow nor fast. Rows upon rows of houses which he had never seen before came into view; and at last, as all the sky was bright with the new day, he saw the green lanes, and began to taste the pure woodland airs.

As soon as he knew himself to be free of the great city, he left the highways and struck a direct course across the green fields. Over the hedgerows and across the pastures he bent his steps; across morasses and through tangled places, not knowing nor desiring to know whither; past hamlets with thatched roofs, and crooked rustic churches; past farm stead-

ings; past stately mansions; over upland and fen, until the sun had reached its zenith in the heavens. He then sat on the hospitable earth, and for a space rested his weariness, on the fringe of a green wood, in a dry warm place, under a splendid tree, alive with sap and the melody of birds.

When again he went his way the sun was still high in the April heaven, though pursuing a steady track towards the west. The wayfarer followed it in a straight line, over hedgerow and pasture, sometimes crossing a brook with his naked feet; at other times leaping a ditch, or breaking through barriers of thorn and timber which seemed insurmountable.

The wayfarer paid no heed to the miles that he made. As the light of the sun began to fail, he found himself upon the wealds and uplands, with the generous sweet-smelling earth ever beneath him. The evening airs seemed to blow with a sharper sweetness; the houses and hamlets grew fewer, yet nature's spontaneity grew ever richer and more rare.

When it was almost dark he reached a little and solitary house on the edge of a great wood. It seemed to be interminable, and full of pungent yet delicately odorous trees. He knocked at the door of the little house. His summons was answered by an old woman in a grey shawl; and for a penny she gave him a cake of bread and a cup of water. He drank the water like one who thirsts; and then he bore his limbs, which now ached with weariness, into the gloomy precincts of the wood. Groping about

in the darkness, he found a dry and sheltered place amid the fresh flowering furze; and here, with his head propped against the bole of a young pine, he ate his food slowly, and then straightway fell into a profound sleep.

When he awoke the sky was alive with beautiful stars. With all of these he was familiar. He rose; and by the delicate light of the heavens, which melted the dark canopies above him, pressed through the brakes and thickets into the heart of the forest. Many were the nimble-footed wild creatures that crossed his path, and in the darkness startled him; he was sensible all about him of weird cries and wonderful voices; they came upon him from every side; but he still pressed on and on into the untrodden darkness of the wood. In his progress his garments were rent and his hands bled freely.

In the process of time, the pathlessness which confronted him everywhere grew less impenetrable. The dawn crept again into the east, the birds took up their loud songs, and flowers and herbs and all the wild things of nature were spread before him in the morning light.

Pressing ever on and on, he came out at last upon the fringe of this great wood, and by now the sun had risen to warm his veins. The wayfarer was now come to the breast of the mighty mother; and on this second day he reposed many hours on the green, dry earth of the forest, looking all about him into its dark recesses, and observing in a kind of secret joy

the ways of the rich, wild life of whom he claimed kinship.

Towards evening he came upon another little house in the heart of the great wood, and then he remembered that he was hungry. Here he obtained from another aged woman a hunch of white bread and a bowl of delicious milk. And then for the second time he lay down and slept in the heart of the great wood.

Days and days did he pass in his wanderings. Sometimes he was in the woodland places, sometimes upon the weald. He would lie in the fallows in the burning afternoon sun; and now and again in the chill of the night, if he could not find warmth in the thickets, he would enjoy the protection of a barn or a cowhouse, or, if these were to seek, he would walk in a joyful silence through the long hours, until the morning was again in his eyes.

One day in his ceaseless journeying he suddenly beheld the sea. It was at noon upon a delicious day of midsummer. He ran down to the beach, with a noble rapture in his veins, and, flinging off his clothes, he waded out into the cool water. For many days he kept ever by the side of the sea. He could not forsake that marvelous companion; and on several occasions, when he found old men in boats upon the beach, he persuaded them to row him out upon the many-smiling wilderness.

Even after the summer had waned his wanderings continued. They bore him into all kinds of wonder-

ful and unexpected places. Sometimes he found himself in the high and mountainous country; and here the grandeur, the solitude, and the marvelous hues and the deep-breathing silences would endue him with the awe of his inheritance. And wherever he was borne by the irresponsible passion of his steps, he beheld infinite wonders. He saw great pits sunk into the bowels of the earth; he saw curious and grimy peoples, yet it cost him no pang to admit them into all-embracing kinship with himself, and with the Earth, his mother.

When as the tints of autumn fell about the quiet earth, and he felt the shrewd airs of the tall mountains of the west, he heard their voices in such wise in his ears, as never before had addressed them. With a loud, fervent cry, he flung himself down upon the fruitful brown soil, and pressed his lips rapturously to the bosom of Earth, his mother.

The wonderful hues of the autmun deepened in their silent rapidity, until the ruthless winter was come. Then the wayfarer persuaded an old shepherd to give him his shawl, and clad therein, and moving ever upon the peaks of the mountains, he came into the north. And there he learned many of the cunning but simple arts of these wise mountain peoples — those hardy children who wrested but a reluctant nourishment from the bare ground.

It was here that, driven by the stress of winter, the wayfarer shared the hospitality of the fisherman's hut, the ploughman's byre, and the rude

hearth of the crofter and the shepherd. It was in these altitudes that he renewed the garments for his back and the shoes for his feet. His scant store of pieces of silver had been consumed long ago, but, like one of his kin in a remote age, he did not fear to beg his bread from door to door. Now and again he would requite his hosts, who asked nought in return, as he sat in the chimney-place, warmed by a fire of peats and a basin of food, with wonderful tales out of the past, and glorious stories of the youth of the world. And these he would clothe in such wise that the simple hearts of his friends would swell with gladness.

He did not fear the snow in the dales, the ice in the burns, nor the barren and implacable wastes which confronted him everywhere. Many and curious were the deeds he performed, strange were the sights that he witnessed. He made acquaintance with the red deer, and the mountain sheep, and the fowls of the moorland; he learned to speak to every man in his own tongue; and never once in all these vicissitudes, although he had no piece of silver in his coat did he suffer denial.

He was ragged and unkempt; he was almost as frail as a phantom; his skin was colored a deep brown by exposure to the weather; his hair, thick and matted, came down to his shoulders, and his large and bright eyes seemed to envelop the whole of his face. By the time the spring came round again, and the cycle of the seasons had completed

itself, he found his feet again upon the yellow shores of the loud-sounding sea. Yet now he did not linger within its magical thrall. For a long dormant passion had again begun to stir within him, and he knew that the hour was near when he must return to the aged man, his father, and to the little room.

Through the brakes of the green woods through which he passed the notes of each bird as it sang were as familiar in his ears as the many and subtle voices of the wind. He could now read the face of the fruitful Earth, his mother, like an open page. All her sweet little mysteries he could decipher; he knew the shapes of her trees, the odors of her flowers, the habits and tracks of all her nimble wild creatures. Yet in his veins the passion was ever rising; he felt it was no longer meet for him to tarry. No more did it beseem him to while away the glad hours with this old gossip. Ere the winter came again he must return to the streets of the great city, and thence to the sanctuary in which he was wont to kneel; and to the white-haired man, his father; and to that other faithful friend who loved him tenderly.

In the gorgeous heat of the midsummer he found himself again upon the mountains of the west. But now the passion was mounting hourly in the veins of the wayfarer, and soon he was to know that it had claimed as its fuel a portion of his vital power. His frame had never been so dauntless and so full

of divine vigor; his brain was like a crystal; but he seemed to know that his power of sight was not what it was.

Upon these heights of the west he brought his power of vision to the proof. He found himself again in those altitudes, which previously he had trod when the hues of autumn were upon them. At that time he was able to discern clearly the adjacent peaks by which they were surrounded; yet on this day of midsummer, although the bright sky was like a mirror of opals, he knew not even their outlines. And he seemed to divine, by a clear foreknowledge, that all about him would soon be dark.

Without hurry, and without fear, although the passion was ever mounting in his veins, the wayfarer turned his eyes to the east, towards the little sanctuary within the heart of the streets of the great city. Mile by mile he retraced the well-remembered steps. Although he could not now discern all that lay about him, as when a twelvemonth since he trod these ways, for his eyes were no longer faithful to him; yet, as his unfaltering limbs overcame the brakes and the thickets, the downs and the pastures, the new and puissant sense of kinship with the Earth, his mother, endued his veins with the strength of heroes.

He could hardly see as he walked through the woodland places, but the joy and the music by which Nature celebrated her noble freedoms, the pæans of his ever-youthful mother filled his ears.

The loud and deep voice, that was so clear and so heroical, made the wayfarer nod and smile at her as he took his way. Pressing ever on and on over hill and dale, through impenetrable fastnesses, by marsh and stream, he rejoiced aloud in her noble fecundity. "Sing, goddess, sing," he chanted continually, "and I will sing to thee!"

The heart of the wayfarer was entranced with gladness as he begged his bread from door to door. And as he came nearer and nearer to the streets of the great city, he began to sing to the Earth, his mother, in a wonderful kind of speech which he knew was pleasant to her ear. And she requited him with her own resonant and golden music, those strange, rapt cadences of her own childlike voice; and these cradled him in sleep, and he dreamed by the wise and gracious light of the stars.

"Kiss me, ever young and gentle one," he whispered to her, as one evening he lay down on the dry mosses of an autumnal wood. "I can scarce see thee now, my mother," he said as he turned his eyes towards the bole of a great tree, under whose wide-spreading branches he lay; "but thy ample speech was never so great in my veins. To-night I shall dream of thee constantly, sweet and gentle virgin which hath had strange issue."

As he lay that night asleep under the great tree, the voice of the Earth, his mother, breathed in his ears. "Return, O Achilles," it said, "to the streets of the great city, without another instant of

tarrying, for in my tenderness for thee, thou brave one, I have endowed thy right hand with strength."

These words awoke the wayfarer. He arose and knelt before the gnarled trunk of the great tree which had been the pillow of his dreams. Pressing his eyes to the green moss over which the ages had passed, he said joyfully, "I heed thee, my mother. Thou who hast lain with the stars in their courses, I will bear myself as the fruit of thy caresses."

The wayfarer drove the pains of sleep from his limbs, and turned his dim eyes towards the east.

"Achilles, thy son, heeds thee, my mother," he said as the bracken began to yield to his steps; "he will not tarry until he has made the streets of the great city, so that when he returns into sanctuary he may find the strength in his right hand."

With bold and quick steps, as light as those of a deer, the wayfarer went his way through the chill dawn. When he came out into the beautiful expanse of the fields, the east shone with morning.

His feet unconsciously sought the well-remembered tracks of his previous way. The will seemed not to direct the steps of the wayfarer, yet not once did they stray from the path upon which formerly they had come. At noon the weather turned bitterly inclement. The winds blew piercingly from every quarter, and presently the first flakes of the winter's snow were shaken out of the adverse heavens. But the wayfarer pressed on and on into the very teeth of the gale. Asking neither shelter

nor refreshment, his frame, in its puissance, consumed the miles, for he feared lest the sight of his eyes should desert him ere he could cross the threshold of the sanctuary that awaited him and the strength he bore in his right hand.

As the sombre light of the afternoon was waning his feet were once more upon the pavements of the streets of the great city. The wind whistled round the corners of the gaunt houses; the air was thickened by gusts of sleet, which pierced his skin, and stung his frame to new endeavors.

He recalled all the objects he passed with a strange kind of exaltation; the houses and shops that he could so indistinctly see; the hurrying crowds of people in the streets — the "street-persons" of his childhood, who were "street-persons" no more. The roar of the traffic filled his surprised ears, yet only to enkindle them with a high and grave joy; for it was another manifestation of that to which his whole being owed its entrancement, the universal voice of the Earth, his mother.

XLIII

THE lamps were being lighted in the streets, yet he could hardly see them. Not once, however, did his feet stray from the path of his well-remembered way.

With the autumnal sleet ever beating upon his bared head, he found himself again in the streets of the great city. On the threshold of a public-house, flaring with many garish lights, he saw a boy selling matches. He was whimpering with the cold, and his teeth were chattering, for he had neither shoes nor stockings; indeed, his only garments were a pair of ragged trousers and a shirt. As the wayfarer discerned this unhappy figure he stayed his steps, and pulling off his own broken boots and threadbare stockings, bade the boy sit down and put them on. When the boy had obeyed, the wayfarer took from his own shoulders the shepherd's shawl which he wore, and wrapped it about him.

Thereafter it was in the scantiest of raiment that he took his way. Yet ere he had come to the threshold of the little room, which he seemed only to have left the day before yesterday, he was destined to take part in a curious adventure.

It happened as he turned into a familiar thorough-

fare, a street long and narrow, and wondrously busy with the great press of people and traffic, that he suddenly became aware of a strange clamor that was arising before him. Cries of consternation resounded on every side; they overcame the shrieks of the piercing winds as they swept round the houses and shops. With his dim eyes the wayfarer could perceive the drivers of the vehicles make frantic efforts to escape from an oncoming danger that threatened them.

Suddenly there came through the failing light of the afternoon the great form of a horse, a huge animal attached to a heavy railway van. There was no driver, the reins were dangling loose; with tossing mane and wild nostrils, the mighty horse was devouring the roadway with furious strides. It escaped a tramcar as by a miracle; it crashed into a milk-seller's cart, and sent milk cans with their contents rolling in all directionss. Yet still it kept its course unchecked, a menace to all whom it passed.

The passers-by, huddling together as far away from the curb as they could squeeze themselves, were then astonished by a strange sight. A ragged, half-naked beggar, hatless, coatless, without shoes and stockings, and with long, matted hair which fell down upon his shoulders, moved off the pavement. He appeared to turn his back upon the mad thing that was approaching him, and then, with a leap of superhuman courage and address,

seemed to fling himself at the head of the infuriated brute as it grazed his bare ankles with its hoofs. He was seen to take the reins in his grasp, and, leaping along at the side of the horse, began an attempt to control its furious speed that was little short of miraculous. In the struggle he was several times carried completely off his feet, and borne yards at a time without touching the earth. And though man and brute and vehicle swayed and rocked in all directions, no obstacles intervened to shatter them: and almost at every yard he was borne the man seemed to gain a firmer purchase on the brute.

For half the length of the thoroughfare the titanic struggle was waged between the man and the brute on the slippery, circumscribed and narrow road. At times it seemed that the man must be hurled away from the brute altogether; at other times it seemed that he must be flung beneath the hoofs of the brute and trampled lifeless; while, again, in the frantic efforts of the animal to be rid of its burden, it seemed that they must both be hurled through the windows of the shops.

Ere long, however, the fury of the horse began to spend itself. And as it did so, with the man still retaining his grasp of the reins, two policemen, stalwart and hardy, and finely-grown men, stepped from the pavement, and, lending their aid at a timely moment, the poor animal was brought under control.

"Well done, my lad," said the policeman to the half-naked beggar in a kind of generous wonder. "Well done, well done! Are you sure you are all right?"

Among the witnesses of the incident was a tall, bronzed man, with closely-cropped hair, who was dressed with remarkable care, and whose bearing was that of a soldier. At his side was a slight, youthful, handsome woman, who was breathless with excitement.

"Upon my word," said the man, "that is the best thing I ever saw. That chap deserves a medal."

The woman, with a strange, dancing brightness in her eyes, looked up wistfully into the face of her companion. "Get him one," she said.

Stimulàted by their generous curiosity, they walked up to the spot where a small crowd was rapidly collecting around the unkempt and extraordinary figure that was almost naked.

"Better take his name and address," said the tall, bronzed man to the two police constables in a slow and calm voice which caused them to touch their helmets.

The tall bronzed man then proceeded to survey the circle of interested bystanders at a dignified leisure, and said in the same tone, "Suppose we send round the hat?"

Removing his own immaculately-ironed silk headgear, he proceeded with an air of exaggerated self-possession, which the conspiracy of the circumstances

rendered bizarre, to drop several pieces of gold into its interior, and then, standing bare-headed, so that the sleet glistened upon the pomatum of his hair, handed his hat to a man near to him, who was of a similar type to himself. However, while this gentleman, also with extraordinary nonchalance, was adding further pieces of gold to the hat, this somewhat impressive munificence was frustrated.

The half-naked beggar appeared suddenly to realize that he was the cynosure of all eyes. He gave a gaunt look all about him, and then, with a motion of indescribable rapidity, he passed through the ring that had been formed. With a swiftness so great that his flight could hardly be followed, the mists of the evening received him.

The bare-headed man gave a glance of courteous deprecation, which almost took the form of a personal apology, to the man who was placing pieces of gold in his hat.

"Rather a pity," he said; "rather a pity to let him go."

"Yes a pity," said the other, wiping a speck of sleet off the brim of the hat very carefully with his glove, and handing it back.

As with an air of disappointment the crowd dispersed reluctantly, the slight, youthful, handsome woman turned with an eager gesture to the owner of the hat. Her cheeks, under their powder, were the color of snow.

"Did you — did you see his face?" she said in

quick, nervous accents. "I shall carry it to my grave. It was — it was the most beautiful face in the world."

The owner of the hat gave the woman a little smile of affectionate indulgence, in which, however, pride was uppermost and handed her very carefully into a hansom.

XLIV

As the bare-footed beggar passed away into the traffic, far from the circle of the curious, before they could impede him, he was able to discern that his thin hands had been lacerated by the reins during the struggle he had waged with the horse. The blood was flowing freely from his torn fingers, but at the sight of it a flush of gladness overspread his cheeks.

"I thank thee, Mighty One," he said, "that thou hast given the strength to my right hand."

It was with bruised and numbed feet that the returned wayfarer came at last to the threshold of the little room.

The aged man, his father, gave a cry of joy when he beheld the apparition that had entered, for, dim as his eyes were, he knew it for the form of one.

The old and the young man embraced one another.

"I have been desolate, Achilles," said the old man with the plaintiveness of age; "I have been desolate. But I knew, O Achilles, that thou wouldst return."

A brave fire was burning upon the hearth, the candles, also, were bright of lustre in the little room.

The young man stretched his wounded hands to

the warmth, and then, with a kind of composed passion, he spread them out before his father.

"Dost thou see, my father?" he said. "Earth, my mother, has given me the strength to my right hand. I think now, my father, I shall be among the English authors."

As he spoke the secret and beautiful smile crept across his wan lips.

"Thou wilt write in the Book, O Achilles?" said the old man, pointing to the table where the mighty tome lay open.

"First, I must write my little treatise upon human life, my father," said the returned wayfarer in the simple accents of his childhood. "And, perchance, my father, when that is written, if the strength is still given my right hand, I may or I may not, write in the Book."

"I myself have not yet written in it, O Achilles," said the aged man, his father, with a look of despair. "And I begin to fear that it may not be given to me to write therein. I am old, Achilles; I am old."

The young man appeared hardly to heed the words of his aged father.

"I will eat," he said, "and then until midnight is told upon the clocks I will repose, and then I will write my little treatise upon human life."

Half-naked and unkempt and bare-footed as he was, the returned wayfarer ate and drank; and he then fell asleep in a chair at the side of the bright

hearth with his feet stretched out before the embers.

While the returned wayfarer slept profoundly, the aged man, his father, heaped up the fire with coals. Then he went forth into the shop, and took from its recesses the materials for writing.

As the old man was conveying these articles, with every precaution that he might not disturb the sleeper, to the table of the little room, he heard a stealthy knocking, with which he had grown familiar, upon the outer shutters of the shop.

Therefore, as soon as the old man had discharged his burdens, he went to the door of the shop and opened it. Upon the outer threshold was a small, wizened man with a shrewd countenance and a short, bristling moustache.

"Has he come back?" asked the man with an eager whisper.

"Yes, he has returned," said the old man; "but he now sleeps."

"Let me see him," said the other in a voice of anguish. "I will not disturb his sleep, and I will not try to cross the threshold of your little room."

"You may follow," said the old man, leading the way through the shop to the threshold of the little room, "but I would entreat you not to proceed beyond this."

"Yes, I will bear it in mind," said the other in a voice of very curious excitement.

When the man from the street came to stand

upon the threshold of the little room, and to peer within at him who lay there asleep, the cry of joy that he could not repress was mingled with an intense consternation.

"Why, where has he been?" he whispered in tones of horror. "See — see, he is all in rags! His feet are bruised and cut and quite bare. And his hair hangs down upon his shoulders like a mane. And his ragged shirt exposes his chest. And his fingers are all covered with dried blood. Tell me, why has he returned like this?"

"He is about to communicate the story of his wanderings," said the old man, pointing to the materials for writing that were spread upon the table of the little room. "He is about to make them into a treatise; when the clocks tell the hour of midnight he will commence author. Therefore, does it not behove us to be patient? When his task is accomplished, I doubt not that we shall be privileged to learn all that has befallen him."

"Ah, yes, I remember," said the man from the street. "I always suspected that one day he might set up on his own account as an author. He has a lot of out-of-the-way knowledge. He looks in a dreadful state to-night, and I shouldn't wonder if he didn't write the better for it. He's evidently been out and seen a bit of life; and you've got to see a bit of life to be an author. At least, Murtle says so; and Murtle ought to know."

"Yes, yes," said the old man softly. "We shall doubtless be informed of all that has befallen him when he comes to take the pen in his right hand."

The man from the street bade good-night to the old man, and begged to be allowed to return the next evening to the threshold of the little room, that he might have speech with him who slept.

XLV

The returned wayfarer, ragged, bare-footed, and dishevelled, continued in his profound sleep by the side of the fire. Not a sound escaped him, not once did he change his posture; and as the hour of midnight approached, the old man, his father, began to have a fear that he would not waken again. But at the first stroke of the clocks, as they told the midnight hour, the wanderer opened his eyes to the full, and, rising immediately from his chair, without pain, and without weariness, sat down exactly as he was before the materials for writing that were spread upon the table, and commenced author.

At first, as he dipped the pen in the ink, and it sought the virgin sheets of white paper, his face was calm and untroubled, and about his lips was a happy smile of peace. Lightly, easily, deftly at first, his right hand, that was now so strong, ran across the paper, without a moment of hesitation, without a single pause or any kind of uncertainty.

Page upon page was traversed by his strong right hand. Not once did it falter, no fault did it commit; and neither blot, nor erasure, nor substitution of one word for another, defiled the fair copy that grew, minute by minute, under the slender, blood-stained fingers. Hour after hour passed; and

the aged man, his father, sat by the side of the fire with his dim and incredulous eyes fixed upon him who wrote. In them was a kind of entrancement.

The beams of the morning stole through the top of the shutters of the little room, but the author did not look up an instant from his labors, and not once did he change the attitude in which he wrote. Neither did he ask to have the shutters thrown back, and the bright lamp removed, even when it was twelve o'clock in the day. From time to time the old man plied the hearth with fuel, and also he procured a second lamp, newly replenished with oil.

In the afternoon the old man went forth of the little room, and making no sound, so that his movements might not be regarded, he penetrated, candle in hand, to a deep cellar below the shop.

In a corner of this chill vault, all covered with cobwebs and grime, was a bottle of a great and aged wine. This the old man removed from the place it had occupied full many years, and bore it, with a care as nice as a woman bears a sleeping infant, up the dark stairs to the little room.

The old man placed the wine near to him who wrote; but, as though unconsciouss of the action, the returned wayfarer pursued his labors.

The old man, his father, then returned to his place beside the bright hearth. The hours passed. All that day the shutters were not taken down from the shop, which was shrouded in complete dark-

ness in the broad light; while in the room behind it a lamp was burning continually, even when the sun was at high noon.

As page upon page was traversed by the strong right hand of him who wrote, and they began to form a delicately-written heap on the table before him, the mood of the author, which at first was so serene and of such calm assurance, began to change. In those large and bright eyes, whose lustre seemed to vie with that of the ever-burning lamp, the inward fire, the controlled passion, the noble self-possession, began, towards afternoon, to yield to the hue of terror. The large and bright eyes began to roll in a strange kind of frenzy. Great beads of perspiration came upon the forehead of the author; they rolled in a stream down his cheeks.

Not once, however, did he pause in those labors which added steadily to the pile of his writings. Although the author appeared to be suffering a more than mortal agony, and that even as he wrote he sought the merciful respite of death, he never once faltered, nor looked up, nor refrained an instant from his task.

Towards the hour of eight in the evening, the listening ears of the aged man, his father, heard a loud tapping upon the shutters of the shop. He rose at once from his place beside the hearth and went forth of the little room, and opened very softly, yet with a kind of despair as he did so, the outer door of the shop.

"Who is he who beats upon the ears of us in our little room?" he asked of him who stood out upon the threshold of the night.

"Has he awakened?" asked the anxious visitor. "I have been fearing all day lest he should not wake any more."

"He is awake and he is writing his treatise," said the old man devoutly.

"I must see him," said the man from the street. "You must let me see him. I will not go beyond the shop. And I will not disturb him as I walk across it."

"He is writing his treatise," said the old man in a tone that would seem to deny him.

"Oh!" cried the man from the street piteously, "I must see him, if only for a moment, now that he is awake."

And so great were the entreaties of the man from the street, that the old man, enjoining many earnest restrictions upon him led him at last with infinite caution through the dark shop, to look upon the face of him who wrote.

However, no sooner had the man from the street looked upon the face of him he had craved to see than he uttered a suppressed cry of dismay and terror. For the face of the returned wayfarer seemed to be convulsed with a mortal agony.

Creeping away with the silence in which he had come to the threshold, without revealing his presence to the returned wayfarer, or causing him once to

refrain from his labors, the man from the street returned in a kind of despair to that outer element of darkenss out of which he had emerged.

"Oh," he muttered, as the scalding tears sprang out of his eyes as he traversed the inhospitable pavements of the streets; "I wish now that I had not seen him. It is just as I thought it would be."

Yet the next evening at the same hour the man from the street tapped upon the shutter again; and again his summons was answered by the old man within.

"How is he now?" asked the visitor breathlessly. "I hope there is no change for the worse."

"You may enter and look upon him," said the old man.

"I don't think I want to do that," said the visitor with fear in his eyes. "I think I would rather not do so."

"Perhaps," said the old man, "you may find a change for the better."

"No, I don't think I will come in," said the man with weak tremulousness; but this he seemed suddenly to discard in a kind of disgust, and he followed the old man through the darkness of the shop.

As he came to stand again upon the threshold of the little room he saw that the returned wayfarer had scarcely changed his posture from the previous evening, and was writing still. The mass of papers before him, covered in a fine and delicate writing, were an ever-increasing pile. Yet the man from

the street hardly dared to look at the face of the writer. At last, however, he summoned the courage to do so, and in the act of beholding it almost revealed his presence by a cry of surprise. For the face was no longer transfigured with terror; it was as calm, serene, and peaceful as that of Nature upon an evening of summer.

Again the man from the street returned to his element; and this time in lieu of his previous despair was a sort of bewildered gladness. The face he had looked upon that evening was one of such wisdom and beauty, that even eyes such as his own could not misread its meaning. "Oh, how beautiful he is! How beautiful he is!" he exclaimed as he walked along.

The next evening the visitor returned once more and knocked upon the shutter; again he was received by the old man who led him within. The returned wayfarer still sat at the table writing his treatise. Again he appeared scarcely to have changed his posture. The pile of writing had grown greater and greater. In mute bewilderment the man from the street gazed upon him. The worn and haggard countenance of him who wrote was convulsed with tears. Yet although they dripped upon the white paper, even as the pen traversed it, he refrained not an instant from his task.

As the unhappy man from the street again sought the outer darkness, he said with a sinking heart: "When he stops writing I am sure he will die!"

On the next evening he presented himself at the shutter for the fourth time.

"How is he now?" he cried to the old man. "Does he still live?"

"You may enter," said the old man; and in the darkness the man from the street could not observe the secret smile that was about his lips.

Ever writing as before, the returned wayfarer had now a face that was radiant with joy. As he continued to fill one page upon another, his lips began to move in a kind of a low crooning chant. When the watcher from the threshold caught the first sounds of his voice, he remembered with one of those pangs with which reason confronts that which lies beyond it, the day upon which he and his boon companions had taken him upon the sea in a boat.

"I don't know how it will end, I don't know how it will end!" cried the man as he entered the streets. His emotion was wrought so highly that he walked the streets until dawn.

Yet again on the evening of the fifth day he returned, and with secret, fearful steps he came to the threshold of the little room. He who sat there was writing still. His cheeks had now sunk into his jaws; his eyes that formerly were so large and bright, lacked lustre; the slender fingers were moving painfully; the gaunt face had almost the composure of death.

The watcher crept forth again to the streets, and walked them in a kind of madness. "I begin to

wish he would die," he said as he took his way. "It is dreadful, it is dreadful! Yes, I wish he would die."

Yet on the evening of the sixth day the man came again and knocked upon the shutter.

"I hope he is dead," he said bitterly as the old man confronted him. "It is dreadful, it is dreadful!"

"He sleeps now," said the old man simply. "Is it not wonderful that the strength should have been given to him to complete his task? But he now sleeps."

They stole together to the threshold, where this superhuman laborer, barefooted and unkempt, and in his rags lay fast asleep. His face was buried amid the great bulk of his writings.

"Oh," said the man from the street with a harsh sob; "he is dead at last."

"Oh, no," said the old man, "he breathes softly."

"Can it be possible?" said the other. "Can he have done all this and yet remain alive? I must see for myself before I can believe it."

The man from the street made as if he would cross the threshold of the little room.

"Beware," said the old man almost sternly. "Did you not promise that you would not go beyond this?"

"Yes, I did," said the other mournfully, "but I am sure he is dead."

"Return to-morrow, my friend, at the same

hour," said the old man, "and be of good hope. He ate and drank before he slept and he promised to awaken."

The next day the man came back again to the threshold of the little room, but the writer still slept with his face buried within his labors.

"He will never awaken, he will never awaken!" said the watcher.

"Be of good faith," said the old man softly. "Return to-morrow again."

The man did as he was bidden, but he who had labored was still asleep.

"Why do you deceive me?" cried the man from the street, almost beside himself with his passion: "you know he will never wake again. And you dare not tell me the truth. I will enter and see for myself."

The old man pushed him back with his feeble strength as he made to cross the threshold. His face had a tragic consternation too dreadful to behold.

"If you cross the threshold," he said, "while he still sleeps he will never, never awaken."

These words and the countenance of the old man convinced the man from the street that such was the truth.

"I will return to-morrow and see if he sleeps still," said the man, returning to the street.

"This passes all understanding," he muttered constantly as he took his way.

XLV

On the following evening, when the man knocked again upon the shutter, and the door of the shop was opened by the old man, he was informed joyfully that the sleeper had awakened. And further, he was told that he had bathed, and had partaken of food, and that now in the little room he sat beside the hearth in the full enjoyment of his mind.

"Do you remain here while I ask him if you may approach the threshold of his little room," said the old man in a glad voice.

The man from the street waited in joyfulness. In spite of his incredulity he seemed to know that the darkness of the night had passed.

"He desires to see you," said the old man as he returned.

The man from the street, scarcely daring to breathe, followed the old man to the threshold of the inner room. Seated beside the hearth, which was ever brightly burning, was the frail figure of his friend, with the great pile of his writings clasped upon his knees. The lustre was extinguished from his worn and beautiful face; his eyes were no longer large and bright, his cheeks were sunken; yet all about him was a high and calm serenity, an inexpressible peace.

"Faithful one," said a voice whose strange quality was hardly more than a reminiscence of that which had once been familiar to the ears of the man from the street, "now that my task is done I will reward your constancy. You shall cross the threshold of my little room. Will you not embrace me, honest friend?"

Speaking these words, the returned wayfarer stretched out his hands to his visitor. Thereupon the man from the street crossed the threshold of the little room and flung his arms about the form of him he had not hoped to clasp again.

XLVI

The two friends sat long hours together conversing of many things. William Jordan, now that his task was accomplished, had never seemed so accessible, so human, so near in sympathy and perception to those things that lay immediately about him. Jimmy Dodson, entranced by the new power and richness of his friend's discourse, gave expression again and again to the delight that he felt.

"Luney," he said, calling him again by that name with which he had always addressed him, "you have always been beyond me, but you have never seemed quite so far beyond me as you do now. Your actions prove you to be out of your mind, but the odd thing is that never in all the years I have known you, have you talked to me as you have talked to-night. You talk to me now, old boy, just as I should expect some of those wise old Greek Johnnies to talk to their pals. And yet you give yourself no airs of saying anything out of the common; and the way you listen to what I say to you and the way you draw me out, gives me the kind of feeling that I myself am a sort of chap like old What's-his-name. Words have never come to me so easily as they have to-night; and as for my mind, I am sure it has never been half so bright. You seem to make me feel, old boy, that

every word you use has a kind of inner meaning; and I understand enough of the meaning inside to know that there is still another meaning inside of that. I don't know where you have been, or what you have done, but I am sure the change that has taken place in you is very wonderful."

"The Giver of all good has at last given the light to your eyes and mine," said William Jordan. "And speech to our lips, and hearing to our ears."

"And the most wonderful thing about you, old boy," said his friend, "is that with all your strangeness I know what you mean. You sit there talking for all the world as if nothing had happened to you. And yet if you don't mind my saying it, a week ago you were up so high that I thought you could never come down again."

"Perhaps it was," said William Jordan, "that I was then besieged by strange spirits. Perhaps it was, Jimmy, that my little treatise could not have got itself written without their aid."

"And now you have written it, old boy, or now, as you put, it has got itself written, what do you intend to do with it?" asked Jimmy Dodson eagerly.

"It is my intention to give it to the world," said William Jordan.

The calm assurance with which the author announced this intention appeared to startle his friend.

"Yes — of course," said Jimmy Dodson nervously; "yes — of course."

A sequel so natural to the strange labors of which

he had been the witness, had, somewhat curiously, never shaped itself in his mind.

"Yes — of course," he reiterated, "of course you will give it to the world. That is to say, you will have it published by somebody. Have you thought which firm you will try first?"

"It is my intention," said William Jordan, "to place it in the good hands of our friends."

"Indeed," said Dodson; and then he added nervously, "yes, I suppose so. What is it all about?"

"You may speak of it as a kind of treatise on human life," said the author.

"A treatise," said his friend. "I hope, old boy, it is not too scientific and not too long."

"In some respects it is 'scientific,' I am afraid," said the author. "You see, it was impossible to keep out 'science' altogether."

"Oh, then," said his friend with an air of relief, "the treatise as you call it is not all pure science. I hope, old boy," he added anxiously, "you have had the forethought to cast it into the form of a novel."

"Yes," said the author, "you might almost say it is a kind of novel — and yet it is a kind of poem too."

"Ah," said his friend hopefully, "that is better. A treatise in the form of a novel may be all right, although much depends upon the length. And a novel in the form of a prose poem; that may be all right too, that is if it is not lacking in dramatic interest. I have heard Octavius lay it down as a fixed

rule that in a prose poem you must have dramatic interest."

"I think I may promise," said the author, with a simplicity that passed beyond the understanding of his friend, "that it is not lacking in dramatic interest."

"Good!" said Jimmy Dodson. "Things are shaping better than could have been expected. Yet you know, old boy — if I must tell the truth — I never quite thought you had it about you to write a really good novel. But you never know, old boy, do you? Some of the smartest writing chaps of the day don't at all look the part. Yet I don't quite know, old boy — you won't mind my saying it — whether you have had quite enough experience of life. I've heard Murtle say that a chap wants enormous experience of life to write a really good novel. I've heard him say to Octavius that he couldn't possibly have done what he has unless he had dined out every night in good society for twenty years. But the novel may be a romance. Of course that would make a difference. A fellow doesn't have to know so much, Octavius says, to write a romance. Yet don't forget, old boy, that other things being all right, grammar, style, dramatic interest and so on, much will depend upon the length. Whatever else it may be I hope it will not be more than eighty thousand words."

"I am afraid," said the author, "the question of 'length' has not occurred to me. But now you speak of it I should not say the length is great."

"Good," said Jimmy Dodson. "Well, I must leave you now, old boy," he added, "to catch my train to Peckham. I can't tell you what a relief it has been to find you quite well again. But I will come back to-morrow evening, and I will look at this novel of yours, and we will talk over the question of offering it to the firm, although if you do that, old boy, you will be obliged, you know, to adopt what they call a pseudonym."

"I intend that the poem shall be published anonymously," said the author.

"Poem!" said Jimmy Dodson, "Why, I understood you to say just now that it was a kind of novel. A poem, you know, would make a difference."

"No," said the author, "I think it would be more accurate to define it as a poem. It is cast in a kind of hexameter which yet is hardly a hexameter at all — at least it is not the metre of Homer and Virgil. You see, Jimmy, this noble and beautiful English speech which you and I use, differs greatly from those other beautiful tongues that the ancient authors worked in. At first I had thought to write this little treatise upon human life in the language of the Iliad, the language of heroic wisdom; but when I came to reflect that this noble modern speech of ours is familiar to more than a hundred million persons, I yielded my desire. Hence you will understand, Jimmy, that to modern eyes and ears the metre may at first appear strange."

"The deuce!" said Jimmy Dodson with a lively

consternation. "A poem! That will make a difference. You see, Octavius declares that it is impossible for poetry to pay now-a-days — his pays, of course, but then he sticks to translations of Homer and the classics — and for years the firm has given up the publication of original verse. But it is too late, old boy, to go into it to-night. I will look at your novel — poem — better call it novel in any case — to-morrow evening, and then I may be able to give you some advice about it."

XLVII

When at last Jimmy Dodson had gone to catch his train to Peckham, William Jordan, who still held the large pile of manuscript upon his knees, proffered it to his father, saying: "My father, I would have you read to me this little treatise upon human life."

The old man, who had not as yet looked upon the labors of his son, received the mass of papers from his hands; and in his peering, half-blind eyes was an extraordinary concentration. His feeble frame possessed by tremors, he sat down at the opposite side of the hearth to peruse that upon which he hardly dared to gaze.

In the face of William Jordan, although there was a remarkable composure and self-security, there was also an expectation amounting almost to anguish, and in the great eyes, which no longer had lustre, there was the intentness that is seen in the eyes of the blind.

As soon as the old man began to read in his weak quavering voice, his face, which was so bloodless and ascetic, broke out into a suffusion of stern and almost uncontrollable joy. The poet, who could not discern this remarkable expression, bent his head to listen; and as the roll and cadence of the lines he had wrought came upon his ears he drew in his breath sharply with half a sob and half a sigh.

All through the night the aged man, his father, read aloud the poem in his weak quavering voice. As he did so, not he only, but the author of it sat with the inanimation of statues. They seemed neither to breathe nor to move; yet sometimes the tears would flow from the eyes of both. At other times every kind of emotion would pass across their faces: terror, joy, pity, laughter, bewilderment, protest, acceptance.

Hour after hour sped, and the passion engendered by the reading seemed to mount in the veins of each. At last towards the afternoon the old man's voice failed him, and through sheer physical weakness he could read no more.

"Pray continue, O Achilles," said the old man. "I am now old, and Nature fails me."

"Nay, my father," said the poet, "Nature has failed me also. I would have you repose a little, and then I would have you continue in your task."

In obedience to the poet's request, the old man laid his reading aside for a while, yet a few hours hence he resumed. And thus it befell that when Jimmy Dodson knocked upon the shutters of the shop at eight o'clock, no heed was paid to his summons. He knocked again and again; his blows were so loud that they echoed all about the streets; yet although he could discern a thread of light stealing from the room behind the shop his demand met with no answer.

He tried the door of the shop but it was secure. However, his imperious need armed him with re-

sources; for climbing up by means of a niche in the shutters, he peered through an aperture at the top. He owed it to an infinite good fortune that the door of the little room was open wide; and he who looked was able to observe its two occupants sitting either side of the hearth. The white-haired old man with a great pile of papers upon his knees was reading aloud to his son; and as revealed by the shadows of the lamp the faces of both were suffused by a most singular emotion.

The evening following at the same hour Dodson returned again to the shop; yet again to his profound astonishment admittance was denied to him. Climbing up for the second time to peer over the top of the shutters he found the cause of his exclusion to be the same.

On the third evening, however, when he knocked upon the shutters he was admitted by the old man.

When Jimmy Dodson crossed the threshold of the little room, William Jordan, who still sat by the side of the fire with the great pile of his writings once more upon his knees, lifted his dull eyes towards his friend, and said with his lips yielding in a smile of exquisite mobility, "Embrace me, my dear friend, embrace me!"

In the gestures of William Jordan was a calm authority that his friend did not seek to withstand. With a somewhat disconcerted bewilderment he deferred to the poet.

"Luney, old boy," he said nervously, "I have been

making a few inquiries about the publication of poetry. Octavius says there is not a publisher in London who would touch your — your poem, unless it happened to be something quite out of the way."

The faces of father and son seemed to embody a single yet occult meaning, yet the eyes of the poet now held no lustre.

"Fear not, good friend," said William Jordan in his soft, clear speech, yet in a tone of such curious sombre irony as Jimmy Dodson had never heard upon his lips before. "I do not think you need fear to carry my little treatise on human life to the house of Crumpett and Hawker at No. 24 Trafalgar Square."

The poet laughed a gentle laughter which caused his friend to look at him in bewilderment.

"Luney, old boy," he said, "what has happened to you lately? I always used to say, you know, that no power on earth would cause you to laugh. You always used to be so serious."

"I laugh now, Jimmy, because I am so happy," said the poet.

"And what has made you so happy, old boy?" said his friend.

"The knowledge, Jimmy, that I am a prince of the blood."

Jimmy Dodson gave a gasp of bewilderment. In mute astonishment he gazed at him who made this inordinate statement; who sat so grave and so composed, and whose singularly clear voice uttered the words with a sincerity which made them seem ra-

tional. "I can't understand him, I can't understand him!" muttered Jimmy Dodson in dismay. "His words and his acts are totally wrong, yet I never saw a man who seemed so marvelously right."

Jimmy Dodson turned to the father of the poet in an incredulous aside.

"What *does* he mean?" he said. "He says he is happy because he is a prince of the blood."

"Would he be of that estate if he were not happy?" said the old man, with a quietude that increased Jimmy Dodson's dismay.

"Ye-es, I suppose not," said Jimmy Dodson in a kind of despair. He looked from the father to the son, from the son to the father, yet in vain he sought to read the riddle of their words.

The white-haired man laid his hand on the great pile of writings which the poet held upon his knees.

"You would not doubt," said the old man in a tone of mild expostulation, "that the creator of this was of the blood royal?"

Jimmy Dodson did not know how to dissemble his surprise. Yet even as he stood confronting the silent, but almost stern interrogations of the father and the son, he knew that an answer was necessary; and further it was borne upon him what the nature of that answer must be.

"Oh, no," said the young man, and with an assumption of carelessness that sat upon him ungracefully, "I should not doubt it for a moment — of course not, not a moment, because — well, because you

see, I happen to know the author. But some chaps — some chaps who don't happen to know the author might doubt it unless they had the proof."

"Here, O friend, is the proof of the infinite power of my right hand," said the poet, caressing almost proudly with his frail fingers that which he had wrought. "You yourself shall examine it; and then as I know you to be worthy of trust you shall carry it to the house of Crumpett and Hawker; and you shall desire them to print it, but of course, as I say, you will not divulge the name of the author."

"Yes, yes, old boy," said Jimmy Dodson faintly, "of course I will not divulge the name of the author. But suppose Crumpett and Hawker — suppose, old boy, Crumpett and Hawker take it into their heads — take it into their fat heads — you never know what publishers will do, old boy, do you? — suppose they take it into their fat heads to refuse your novel, or your poem, or your treatise, or whatever you call it?"

The poet smiled.

"Courage, faithful one," he said. "You have yet to read this little treatise, have you not? You have yet to learn the infinite power of this right hand. And those worthy street-persons, Messrs, Crumpett and Hawker, will not their eyes glow with a proud joy when they learn it also?"

Jimmy Dodson did not dare to look upon the rapt gaze of the sightless poet.

"Ye-es, old boy," he said miserably, "ye-es, old boy, I suppose they will."

"Their eyes will dazzle," said the poet, "when they behold that which has been wrought for them and theirs, and for ages unborn. A man-child has been wrought out of the soul of Man. Once more the cycle has completed itself. Fact and Speculation, Reason and Imagination stand together in a more intimate relation. In all humility I say to you, dear friend, a new dignity has been given to human nature."

With an ineffable gesture the poet gave the first pages of his poem into the hands of his friend.

"I — I really, old boy," stammered Jimmy Dodson, "I — I am nothing like good enough scholar to have an opinion about it."

A divine self-security overspread the gaunt features of the poet.

"It is its merit," he said, "that it is not food only for the proud. It is wrought in the simple English speech that is the birthright of the humblest of our countrymen. It is not wrought for him who sits only in his little room; it is wrought for all those dear and sweet people who throng the pavements of the great city. Earth, my mother, issued her mandate; I obeyed it; many days I sojourned in the soft brown bosom of the mighty one; I communed with her children; I walked with all the fair things she had wrought from her own bowels; and in her good pleasure she touched my lips with speech, and she gave the strength to my right hand. All who are simple and gentle of heart will take sustenance from this

little treatise upon human life. Scan the first lines, faithful one, you who are simple and gentle of heart, and then the pressure of your hand shall tell me that my labors are not vain."

With indescribable pangs, Jimmy Dodson deferred to the insistence of the glazed eyes, which although as lifeless as those of a statue, seemed to possess the power to hold him in thrall.

Dodson yielded a mournful obedience. In spite of the firm conviction that his poor friend was now hopelessly overthrown, such an imperious power seemed to reside in a face that was formerly the mansion of an exquisite gentleness, that he could not summon the resolution to resist. But even as the unhappy young man took the first page in his hand and his eyes met the ordered rows of firm but delicate writing with which it was covered, he knew how correct was his prophecy. Hardly a phrase, hardly a word that there was written addressed his reason in any aspect of coherence or good sense.

There was a long pause, a crucifying silence, in which the poet, his aged father, and the unhappy reader confronted one another in passive bewilderment.

The poet seemed to devour the face of his friend with his sightless eyes.

"W-what shall I tell him?" said Dodson to the old man in the extremity of anguish.

"Speak only the truth," said the old man. "Let nought be concealed. Nature who has vouchsafed to

him all things, will preserve the first of her sons from the stroke of joy."

"Oh, I can't speak the truth," said Dodson. "It would be worse than hitting him in the face."

"Can it wound Achilles to receive the affirmation of his quality?" said the old man, whose voice was like a knell.

Dodson's veins felt a sharper chill.

"They are both mad," he muttered, "hopelessly mad!"

The old man took Dodson's arm in a grip of which none could have suspected him to be capable; and his pale and wasted features had now become as imperious as those of the sightless poet.

"You must tell him the truth," said the white-haired man, whose countenance was so strangely transfigured, "you must deny nothing to one who is consumed by the divine hunger for recognition. It is meet that the creator should be told that his work is good. It is the crown of his superhuman labors that they should receive the sanction of those for whom they have wrought."

"You do not speak to me," said the poet, in a voice that was rare and strange. "Is it, friend, that you are no longer ——? No, I will not doubt one who lodges in my bosom."

"Speak," said the old man in the voice of a raven. "The days of Achilles are now few. Speak that the faithful may render that which he needs."

Dodson felt his own silence to be destroying him.

"I will speak," he said in terror and despair. "I — I am no scholar, old boy, as you know. I don't understand Greek; I know hardly a word of Latin; but I'll just say this ——" The unhappy Dodson clenched his hands and the sweat began to course down his cheeks, "I'll say just this — to my mind there is nothing — there is nothing in the whole of the world ——"

The dying poet, whose eyes were sightless, quivered like a stricken bird.

"Courage, Achilles!" he muttered faintly, pressing his frail hands to his heart. Then, stretching them forth, he turned his gaunt and gray face upon his friend. "Give to me those honest hands which I know to be trembling violently," he said.

The unhappy Dodson yielded his hands to those of the blind poet.

"How they tremble, how they tremble!" said the poet. "They have a rarer eloquence than your lips, my friend. Let them embrace me; let them embrace me that I may pay you with my love."

As the unhappy Dodson clasped the frail broken form in his strong arms, he seemed to learn quite suddenly why those once so lustrous eyes had the hard glare of stone.

"Oh, Luney, Luney!" he cried in a kind of wail as the truth revealed itself, "do not tell me that you have been blind all these days and that I have not known it!"

"A man's blindness is no affliction," said the dying

poet, " if only he be secure in his friends. The sight of his eyes is as nothing in comparison with that which is given to his right hand. My great labors are near to their fruition, and I have a friend. And I am very happy, O my friend, and it is in this: the gentle and beneficent Earth, my mother, who has smitten her son with her caresses, bids me commit to your care the little treatise I have wrought on human life, on the life of man, on the life of the proudest of her children. Faithful friend and servant, I ask you to be the good angel of the public need. These eyes of mine are now void, as were those of my peers long ago; and the aged man, my father, is infirm and white-haired and unlearned in the ways of men — therefore, I confide to your care this which I have wrought. I ask you to take it away and print it immediately, and spread it broadcast among all the streets of the great city; and when all the street-persons have looked on what a lost soul in Hades has fashioned out of blood and tears, in order that they may find new sustenance, this weak and frail implement which has revealed the will of the Most High, shall return again to Earth, his mother, and weary with his great labors she shall take him gently upon her breasts."

The blind poet uttered these strange words with a noble simplicity which yet filled his friend with dismay. As the great bulk of writing was committed by the poet into the care of the unhappy Dodson, the young man, powerful and materialistic as he was,

seemed almost to faint under their intolerable burden.

"Take it, friend," said the dying poet. "Keep it jealously; it is a thing without price. And remember that I now count the days. And further remember my task is not accomplished until your own is fulfilled. Take this treatise straightway to that great house of publishers, which is the first of this country, wherein I, a slave, spent seven years of my existence upon the earth; and see that it is printed and bound with all the haste possible, and further that it is spread broadcast among all the persons in the streets of the great city, because until that is done, I cannot lie at peace."

The unhappy Dodson stood as one all broken with pain.

"Y-yes," he said feebly, "I will take them to the office to-morrow — and — and, old boy, I will tell them to set it up at once. I — I will tell them that the author is impatient — that he has not much time — that — that his time is nearly up — and — and that he wants to know that others know what he has done for them before he goes."

With a sinking heart the unhappy Dodson made the great pile of manuscript into a parcel with the aid of brown paper and string, in precisely the fashion that in former days he had instructed his *protégé*. As suddenly he recalled his demeanor towards one who had now acquired a transcendent sanctity, his own eyes grew blind with their tears. Yet over and above

his intolerable emotion that which dominated his thoughts, was the knowledge that the mission to which he was pledged was foredoomed to fail.

"I don't know much about literature — don't pretend to," said the unhappy young man, as he slipped the string round the parcel in a kind of dull anguish, "but it wouldn't surprise me at all, old boy, if this doesn't turn out to be the longest poem in the English language."

"I believe it is a little less than three times the length of the *Paradise Lost*," said the poet, with absolute composure, yet touched by that curious irony that his friend had never understood. "And I am reminded that I would have them print it with great clearness in three honest tomes. Each volume should coincide with a phase of the poem; you will observe that there are three phases to our little treatise, which correspond with those of human life — three phases through which the soul of man must pass in its terrestrial journeyings. On the first page, only the name of the poem must be set forth; the name of the poet must not appear. And further, good friend, I urge you to observe the profoundest secrecy as to the authorship of this treatise upon human life. The identity of the author must never be disclosed."

"Why must the identity of the author never be disclosed, old boy?" asked Jimmy Dodson, whose bewilderment and consternation were ever increasing.

"I am fearful," said the dying poet, with that

curious smile that was at once proud, gaunt, and melancholy. "I am fearful lest my countrymen should incur the mockery of future ages by seeking to re-embody the life of the first among their authors."

XLVIII

Days passed ere Jimmy Dodson returned again to the little room. They were fraught with dire anxiety for the blind poet and the aged man, his father. In his heart the old man was filled with despair, and he knew not how to obtain the strength wholly to conceal his fears. What if he to whom they had entrusted their priceless treasure should never return to them again! He had neither the devotion nor the blind faith of the dying man.

"They are printing it, they are printing it!" the poet would exclaim many times in the day as he kept the chair beside the hearth.

"What if that strange street-person were never to return to us?" the old man was moved to ask in his despair on the evening of the sixth day.

"Ah, thou dost not know that brave and faithful one, my father," said the dying poet. "He will overcome fire and the sword rather than his ministry should fail in these last hours of our necessity."

And on the evening of the seventh day there came a gentle tapping upon the shutters of the shop. With a cry of eagerness the old man opened the door in response, and the forlorn figure of Dodson was seen upon the threshold, his face all drawn with suffering.

"Welcome, welcome," cried the old man in tones that were thin and overwrought. "Have you brought back the printed book?"

Dodson recoiled from the old man in a kind of harsh rage. He laid one hand upon his coat, and said in a morose whisper, "You will have to know the truth!"

"The truth," said the old man, with an unsuspectingness which seemed to exasperate the man from the street. "The truth! Why fear to tell it?"

"The truth is this," said Dodson. "There is not a publisher in London who would print poor Luney's poem."

The old man fell back against the door of the shop with a little cry.

"But — but the first mind of the age lies at the point of dissolution!" he exclaimed. "They owe it to themselves that they cherish its fruits. Do they not know that death itself respects his labors, and awaits some token of homage from those for whom he wrought?"

"Yes, yes," said Jimmy Dodson mournfully. "I know all that, my good old man; I have heard it all before; but you and I must not be high flown. We must look the facts in the face. We must deal with things as they are. A week ago I carried it to Octavius — Octavius, you know, is the head of our firm, which is the chief, in fact the *only* publishing house in London, and therefore, you know, in the world. Well, as soon as Octavius saw the first page he said, 'I am afraid, Mr. Dodson, this will never do,' I am

giving you the precise words he used; it is no use for you and me to deceive ourselves, is it?"

"Oh, oh," said the old man incredulously. "But that is the verdict of only one man, a single street-person, an ignorant man who is neither gentle nor simple."

"You may be right," said Dodson, "and yet again you may be wrong. But I must tell you, old man, that the house of Crumpett and Hawker has nothing to learn. What they think to-day, the trade thinks to-morrow. What they don't know is not business. And you must understand that I did not rest content with the opinion of Octavius. I took it down-stairs and showed it to W. P. Walkinshaw, a highly cultivated man. And although he does sit down-stairs, he has had a large and varied experience. And as soon as I had told him what it was, he said, 'Really, Dodson, one has no need to look. A poem in blank verse, three times the length of *Paradise Lost* — why, really, my good fellow, there is not a publishing house in this country who would take the string off the parcel.'"

"No, no, no," said the old man, beating his fingers upon the counter of the shop. "These unbelievers must not be permitted to speak in ignorance. Is it possible that the human soul can remain insensible to the nobility of its god-like power?"

"Well, as it happens," said Dodson mournfully, "I did ask Pa to be kind enough to pay particular attention to it. But as soon as Pa cast his eyes over it, he used the identical words that were used by Oc-

tavius. 'I am afraid, Dodson,' he said, 'this will never do.'"

"Can it be possible," cried the old man, "the noblest achievement of the modern world to be thus discarded!"

"And I didn't stop at Octavius, and I didn't stop at Pa," said the mournful emissary. "I went up-stairs again to Robert Brigstock, who gives Octavius a hand with the *belles lettres*, and who is on the staff of the *Journal of Literature*. And as soon as Robert Brigstock read that accursed first page, he said, 'May I ask, Mr. Dodson, has the writer of this an established reputation?' 'Oh, no,' I had to confess, 'he is quite a young chap who has never published anything at all.' 'Well, then, Mr. Dodson,' said Robert Brigstock, who as I say is on the staff of the *Journal of Literature*, 'no one deprecates more firmly than I do the amazing presumption that is here revealed. The writer sets out to write a treatise on human life — a somewhat timeworn theme, Mr. Dobson — which is three times the length of *Paradise Lost*'— I am telling you word for word what Robert Brigstock said —'and he does this in a metre which Homer and Virgil would certainly not have used had they had to deal with the English language. Can anything be more presumptuous, than that an unknown writer — who surely has been to neither of our universities, or most certainly he would never have proposed to perpetrate such a gratuitous piece of effrontery — that a man who has not received a regular education should at-

tempt that which would give pause to all the foremost of our English poets, from Chaucer to the Poet Laureate, poets, Mr. Dodson, whose reputations have long been established beyond the range of controversy.'

"And if you had seen Robert Brigstock, who as a rule is the mildest and most amiable and most polite of all fellows imaginable, who is a bit of a poet himself, begin to work himself up into a kind of frenzy over that first page, you would have understood, old man, far more clearly than I can hope to make you understand how hopeless it is to get any publisher — I don't care who — to undertake poor Luney's effort on his own responsibility."

The aged father of the dying poet gave a groan of despair. He lifted up his feeble arms, which seemed to be smitten with palsy, and uttered a high quavering cry of imprecation.

"Are these the tidings we must bear to the dying Achilles!" he cried. "Must we thus affront that mighty warrior who lies all spent and broken from his great labors!"

"Well, old man," said Dodson, who could not forbear to pity such a distress as this, "I cannot hope to make you understand how hopeless it is; only one thing we can do if we are to bring poor Luney's poem to the public notice. We must print it and publish it at our own expense."

"Yes, yes," said the old man eagerly, "of course

we must do that. And we must do it immediately because the sands of life are running out."

"Yes, I have thought of all that," said Dodson, "and I have made some inquiries of the firm. But of course it is going to cost money."

"Money!" said the old man.

"A lot of money. I have talked to Octavius about it. I am on very good terms with Octavius, and as a sort of special favor to me, Octavius says Crumpett and Hawker will break through their invariable rule of not publishing on commission; and they are prepared to place their imprint — their very valuable imprint — on poor Luney's poem, providing it is written grammatically — you know Crumpett and Hawker would not publish the Laureate himself if he failed to write grammatically — and also, providing that its tendency is not too agnostic, that is to say, agnosticism impinging on paganism, that is to say that it contains a definite idea of God — these are Octavius's own words I am using — and further that it is not open to the charge of immorality in any shape or form, in other words, as Octavius says, that it is the kind of thing that any young girl may place in the hands of her grandmother. Well, now, everything being all right, Crumpett and Hawker are prepared to put it in hand at once, and to print two hundred and fifty — they won't do less — and to issue the poem in three volumes at one guinea net. The cost, however, will be two hundred pounds, which must be

borne by the author. For this sum they will use good paper, clear type, and they will bind it in superior cloth, and they will send out fifty copies for review to the leading London and provincial journals; but Octavius assures me that Crumpett and Hawker will touch the book only on these terms, and on no other."

The old man gave a gasp of consternation.

"Two hundred pounds," he said weakly, "two hundred pounds!"

"Yes," said Dodson, "two hundred pounds is a lot of money; but it will have to be found if poor Luney is to hold his book in his hands before he dies."

"I have not a tithe of that great sum among the whole of my worldly possessions," said the old man forlornly.

"Nor I," said Dodson. "I have hardly a red cent laid by, because you know I have now to support my people; but if I could lay my hands at this moment on two hundred pounds, poor Luney's book should be through the press before he hears his name called."

"Come into the shop," said the old man feebly, "and tell me if you think some of the venerable tomes on the shelves might produce that — that large sum."

Dodson entered the shop and the old man struck a match and lit the gas. A very brief examination of what Dodson conceived to be a useless mass of lumber, for all the volumes were very black, faded,

dusty, and stained with time, sufficed to enable him to form a verdict.

"I don't suppose," said he with a candor which numbed the old man's veins, "the whole lot together would fetch two hundred pence. I never say such a collection — never!"

"I must pray for a miracle to happen again," said the old man. "One happened to us on a day."

"Did it indeed?" said Dodson.

"Yes," said the old man. "The great Achilles was threatened with expulsion from his little room. Unless I, his custodian, could obtain the sum of twenty pounds by a certain day, it was ordained that he should be cast out into the streets of the great city. Yet on the eve of that day, when all hope had been abandoned, a man out of the street, a street-person walked into this shop, looked upon all these shelves, and took down one after another of these venerable tomes, and paying over to me the sum of two hundred pounds, walked out of the shop with one of these old volumes in his care."

"What was the old volume?" said Dodson, with an air of keen interest.

"A Shakespeare of the first folio," said the old man.

Dodson gave a low whistle.

"Oh, was it," he said. "Then I should think that that street-person was not such a bad judge after all." James Dodson turned his attention again to the

shelves, in which were many gaps, with a livelier curiosity. "There don't appear to be many first-folio Shakespeares left now," he said in a tone of keen disappointment. "But it is no good supposing that there would be; these things have been pretty well gone through. Some street-person has picked all the pearls these many years, I expect. All that is left is hardly worth carting away. As I say, all that remains on your shelves, old man, would barely fetch two hundred pence."

"Can we do nothing to obtain the sum of two hundred pounds?" said the old man. "Surely in this extremity a miracle must happen to us again."

"I am no believer in miracles myself," said James Dodson. "I have no faith in ghosts, spiritualism and sea-serpents either. But it is clear to my mind that that two hundred pounds has got to be found somehow; yet it looks as though a miracle *will* have to happen before it turns up."

"And the hours are so brief," said the old man in his impotence. "Each day is beyond price; the great Achilles grows frail."

For a space Dodson was plunged in deep thought. He was not of the mettle that yields lightly to despair.

"By the way," he said, "what was that very funny-looking old volume I saw on the table in your little room — you know, the funny old volume that seemed to have its pages scrawled over in red ink. Well, now it has struck me that those pages — I

didn't look at them carefully — were of the finest vellum of the sort they don't make now-a-days. If that is the case a dealer might be willing to pay a good price for it, if the red scrawl was nicely cleaned off."

At these words, uttered with singular carelessness, the old man staggered back against the counter of the shop. He trembled in every limb, his face was piteous to see.

"You mean the Book of the Ages," he said. His voice seemed unrelated to anything in nature.

"I don't know what you call it," said Dodson, "but it looks very heavy and well-bound, and I dare say it is valuable in its way. Vellum of the old monastic sort fetches a rare good price now-a-days if you know where to take it. I shall send a chap with a handcart for it to-morrow, and he shall take it to Temple and Ward, the dealers in Bond Street, and we will see what can be raised."

"The Book of the Ages!" said the old man hoarsely; "the Book of the Ages!"

"Yes," said Dodson indifferently, "the Book of the Ages — rather a good name for it. If that vellum is as old as I think it is, and that red scrawl is nicely got off, and the edges are trimmed, and the surface is cleaned up a bit, there may be money in it. People do buy such rum things now-a-days by way of curios, and they don't seem to mind paying fancy prices for them either."

"The Book of the Ages!" the old man repeated.

In his peering eyes were a horror and a consternation that were truly dreadful, yet they were totally unnoticed by his visitor.

"Of course, you know," Dodson continued, pursuing this new idea, which, remote as it was, seemed to afford the only prospect of obtaining two hundred pounds, "I shall have to pitch a tale about it to the dealers. I must fix up some sort of a history, you know, about its being found in the tomb of the Pharaohs, or its being the very identical sheepskin upon which the Scriptures were written. But you must leave that to me. I shall go round and see Temple and Ward to-morrow, and you can lay to it, old man, that I shall have thought of something by then. But, in the meantime, if you really do believe that miracles happen — I wish I could believe it myself — you had better think about it, old man, as much as you possibly can, for I've read somewhere that when you do want a thing to happen, it is a good plan to keep your mind on it all the time."

Before the old man could consent to a suggestion which he did not know how to derive the power to sanction, the voice of him who sat in the little room was heard to summon James Dodson.

"Why don't you come to me?" said the voice from within. "I can hear the voice of my friend. Why don't you come to me with the printed sheets?"

In some trepidation Dodson obeyed a summons, which sounded almost imperious upon the lips of him from whom it proceeded.

"The printed sheets," said the dying poet, stretching out his hands. "Please place the printed sheets in my hands. I would have my father read what is printed there, because this little treatise must go forth without fault or sully."

"They have not started to print it yet, old boy," said Jimmy Dodson dismally.

"Why — why is that?" cried the dying poet, with a consternation that was almost petulant. "Do they not know that a term has been placed to my days, that the sands of life are running out in the glass?"

"Yes, old boy, they know all about that," said Jimmy Dodson; "they know all about that, and — and ——"

"And — and!" said the stricken poet with an imperiousness that was regal. "Are these the words that are brought to me by one whom I love?" In a controlled excitement, that was almost stern, the stricken man raised himself in his chair. "Your arm, Jimmy," he said, with a look of such authority that it filled the unhappy Dodson with dismay. "Lead me to the printers. I must speak to them myself."

The poet sank back in his chair in the tender arms of his friend. The little strength that remained to him was no longer sufficient to bear his frame.

"Yes, old boy," said Jimmy Dodson, "be quite calm, and sit there quietly. There is no need for you to excite yourself. I — I will go round to the printers early to-morrow and — and I — I will tell

them just what you say. I will see that they hurry, although by nature, old boy, printers, as you know, are dreadfully slow."

"So be it," said the poet, with an expression of noble magnanimity upon his beautiful face; "do not think that I reproach you — it would break my heart in pieces to reproach you, dear friend."

At these words Dodson, who, throughout his interview with the father, had remained so calm and self-secure, now turned away hastily from him who was sightless, with a half-strangled sob.

"You do not tell me in what manner Crumpett and Hawker received our little treatise," said the poet.

Dodson found it a great matter to recover his wise self-possession, but by the time the poet had repeated the question he had regained it.

"Why — why, in what manner could they receive it, old boy?" said Jimmy Dodson. "What *could* they say to it? What does a religious chap say to the Bible? What does a scholar say to Homer? What does everybody say to Shakespeare?"

"It is almost more than I can realize," said the poet, with a look of rapture that seemed to sear the veins of his unhappy friend.

XLIX

Dodson promised bravely, recklessly, despairingly that the next time he entered the little room he would bring the first printed sheets of the book. For the poet's insistence that each line must undergo a rigorous scrutiny before it was given to the world was reiterated again and again that evening with an imperiousness that, in one formerly so gentle and timid, astonished its witness beyond measure.

"Luney, old boy," said Jimmy Dodson in a rather bewildered manner after several of these austere reminders, "I am not accustomed to move in royal circles, I have never been spoken to by a king, but if ever I was, old boy, I should expect him to speak to me just like that. You make me feel, old boy, that I have no right to call you Luney any longer — it seems almost like an act of presumption — you make me feel, old boy, that I ought to address you as "my lord," or as "sire."

The poet laughed a strange, rarefied note of laughter.

"Ah, dear Jimmy," he said, "in the presence of the faithful we will not insist on our royalty too much."

Dodson could frame no reply. Such words appeared to transcend those bounds indicated by human

intelligence which the speaker had seemed to overstep so many times already. But, to the amazement of the beholder, the white-haired old man, who all this time had sat at the table with his eyes pressed devoutly to the Book of the Ages, rose at these words of the dying poet, and with a grave deliberation sank upon his knees before him who was blind.

"My liege," said the old man humbly, "I would not have you consider your servants to be insensible of your quality if they do not address you in the fashion which it would seem to demand. Sire, your servants do not esteem your royalty to be the less because they do not wear its livery upon their lips."

Smiling his secret and beautiful smile, the dying poet extended his right hand, so white, so fragile, and so transparent towards the aged man, his father, with the sweet air of a great prince, and the old man, still kneeling, bore it to his lips.

Ever smiling in the same manner, the dying poet then extended the fragile hand again, this time towards the astonished Jimmy Dodson, whose every faculty seemed to be atrophied by so strange a situation.

"We would have thee also make obesiance, faithful servant," said the poet gently. "It is not for this insignificant flesh that we seek thy homage; it is not to appease an unworthy pride, which too often devours princes, that we would crave thy vassalage. Rather it is that we would have all who are gentle and simple offer their devotion to that which alone makes the

life of man comprehensible, of which this broken clay is the too frail custodian."

With a shamefaced trepidation, which only recently he had been taught to feel, James Dodson sank to his knees before his dying friend, and, in the fashion of the white-haired old man, he bore the fragile hand to his lips. He then rose, and, without venturing to give a look to either of the occupants of the little room, he made a headlong flight through the shop into the all-enfolding, ever-welcome darkness of the streets.

L

The poet and his father passed that night together, as they had passed so many others, in the little room. The blind man, seated by the fire, alternately dreamed and mused, while his father conned the book which was spread open on the table. For the last time he conned it with the blood like water in his veins. Yet in him now was the mute acceptance of those who have passed through the whole gamut of their suffering, upon whom experience has nothing more to confer.

In the dead of the night, while the dying poet was murmuring strange words in his sleep, the old man took for the last time from their receptacle the challice, the bistoury and the stylus. A hundred times had his flesh been pierced in vain by that inexorable point, yet again this night he made trial of it, and for the last time.

And now his trial was not without reward. No sooner had he dipped the stylus in the red blood of his veins than it began to traverse the page. For the first time since those fingers had grasped the pen, the fruit of eighty years of vicissitude upon the wonderful earth flowed to the parchment. Line by line grew the writing. That which he had labored these long years to express, that for which he had prayed, fasted

and kept vigil, was now born without a pang in this brief but magic hour.

Faint with joy, yet also filled with a nameless fear, the old man addressed the poet as soon as he awoke.

"Achilles," he said, "wilt thou write thy page in the Book of the Ages, in order that our dynasty may continue itself?"

"Nay, my father," said the poet, with a noble conviction; "it is not for me to inscribe my page in the Book. For are not the conditions fulfilled by which our dynasty shall cease. A thousand years, my father, has it striven to affirm itself; and it is written that in the magic hour it shall achieve its apotheosis, it shall be effaced, in obedience to Universal Law. Yet be of good courage, O my father, for it perishes only to achieve re-embodiment in an ampler notation. In the hour this little treatise upon human life is wrought, the archives of our dynasty are as seed scattered broadcast upon the four winds for the service of all the peoples in the world."

Such words of high authority proceeding from those revered lips filled the old man with a courage and a resolute acceptance of that which was about to befall, which he had never hoped to achieve.

"Is it seemly, O Achilles," said the old man, having derived a vital strength from the poet's wisdom, "to efface the means by which a new lustre is given to the heavens?"

"It is as seemly, O my father," the poet answered, "as it is to pluck the stalk from the ripe fruit."

It was therefore in no mood of passion, of wild soul-searching; that the old man yielded those magic parchments which for a thousand years had been as the archives of his race. He bowed to the decree of fate with that calm acceptancy which, in the end, had ever been the crown that awaited each individual destiny.

Yet, when this volume, which was a thousand years old, had passed for ever from the precincts of the little room, he did not reveal the marvelous circumstance to him who was blind.

However, in the evening of that day, the poet said, as if armed with a prophetic vision, "My father, why dost thou turn no more to the Book of the Ages?"

The old man took the poet's fragile hand to his lips with a humble gesture of obeisance.

"Because, O Achilles," he said, "is it not seemly, since thou thyself wouldst have it so, that when the ripe fruit is plucked the stalk shall be discarded?"

"Verily, my father, thy wisdom is commendable," said the poet, speaking in the perfect simplicity of the blood royal.

LI

After the Book of the Ages had been dispersed among the great world out of doors, many were the days that elapsed ere the dying poet's faithful emissary was seen again in the little room. The old man was thrown into a fever of dread lest so strange an envoy should never return; but even in the extremity of his fears he was consoled by the noble courage of the poet. From day to day he who kept the chimney-side, and whose hours could be numbered as they passed, retained a superhuman serenity throughout the whole of this cruel period, which seemed to gnaw at the vitals of both. In his invincible fortitude he even sought to assuage the distress of the aged man, his father.

"He will never return, O Achilles," wailed the old man.

"Our honest servant will not fail one who is the comrade of kingly death, O my father," said the blind poet, smiling in his faith.

"Must I pray for a miracle, Achilles?" said the old man, who looked to him in all things now.

"We would have thee be of good faith, my father," said the poet. "Never yet was a destiny but that it fulfilled itself. The printing-presses are groaning under these pages of ours. To-morrow they will be

strown like autumn leaves all about the floor of this little room."

Yet the morrow came and the emissary did not return. Another morrow dawned and yet he came not. Day succeeded day; the dying poet became as one who has scarce the strength to raise his limbs; the sands grew less and less in the glass; yet still no breathless messenger issued forth from the streets of the great city.

In this long-drawn suspense such an anguish of despair besieged the old man, that again and again he turned to the poet for the sustenance which it was his to give.

"Be of good courage, O my father," said the dying poet, yet at this time the whole of his right side was become paralyzed, so that he could no longer raise his right hand.

After listening full many weary nights and days for the ever-expected tap upon the shutters of the shop, there came at last the familiar sound in a December evening.

With unsteady limbs the old man went forth to unbar the door. Upon the threshold stood Dodson, worn and pale.

"Do not tell me the miracle has not happened," cried the old man in a high, quavering tone.

"Yes, the miracle has happened," said Dodson in a voice that was thin and unstrung.

"And — and they have printed the mighty pages?" cried the old man.

"Yes," said Dodson, "they are printing the cursed pages. I have the proofs of the first volume under my coat. The others will be through the press in a few days."

The old man gave a cry of joy.

"Then the miracle has happened for the second time," he said; "The Book of the Ages was cherished by the world of men."

"Call it what you like," said Dodson. "Call it a miracle, call it a business transaction, or call it a daylight robbery, or anything you please. I can only say that James Dodson had to scour heaven and earth to get that miserable two hundred pounds. I lied to the dealer; I drew up a false pedigree for those infernal pages of parchments; I cajoled them into believing that black was white; I proved to their satisfaction that that cursed writing in red ink was that of the Pharaohs, and was supposed to be indelible, because, do what they would with their chemicals, they could not get it to come off."

"Oh yes, yes," said the old man, breathing heavily. "I should have made it known to you that the writing in the Book of the Ages can never be effaced."

"Whatever that infernal writing was," said Dodson, "it was the cause of my not being able to get the two hundred pounds I asked for from the dealers. Do what I would, say what I would, it was only by sheer good fortune that I was able to get one. They happened to take a fancy to the clasp of that infernal volume; and as I had the presence of mind to tell

them it was formerly the clasp of an ancient Roman libellus, they wrote out a cheque for one hundred pounds, less five per cent. for cash. And after that I had enormous difficulties to raise the other hundred. Talk about the labors of Hercules; what are they to the labors of one who attempts to raise a hundred pounds upon no security in this Christian country? I lied to my aunt; I put my name to an instrument that may land me in jail; I lied to Octavius; I cheated an insurance company; and, as a consequence of all this, the great house of Crumpett and Hawker have undertaken to send out this three-volume poem for review on the twelfth of January. And let me tell you, old man, that in all the long and honorable history of that world-famous publishing house, James Dodson is the only man who has ever caused it to betray signs of what you might call undignified haste."

"No words of mine can requite you, sir," said the white-haired man, whose eyes welled with gratitude. "But yet the proud consciousness is yours that unborn ages will be your debtors."

"Their monickers on a note of hand or on a three months' bill don't go for much at this hour of the day," said James Dodson. "I too, like poor Luney, appear to have made the mistake of being born before my time. And it seems to me that of all the mistakes a man can commit, there is none quite so bad as that."

However, no sooner had Jimmy Dodson come again into the presence of him who kept the little room,

than all these tribulations to which he had given so free an expression in the shop, yielded immediately to that solicitude, mingled with awe, with which he had come to regard him.

"Ah, friend," said the dying poet, "so here are the printed pages at last."

"Yes, old boy, here they are at last," said Jimmy Dodson.

"Give them to me," said the poet, extending his left hand, which he could scarcely raise.

Dodson placed a few of the printed sheets upon the extended palm, which shook like gossamer; and as the poet, with a look of composed passion, held them up before his sightless eyes, it seemed almost that those dead orbs were again endowed with life.

"The paper is good," said the poet, rubbing the pages against his cheek in order that he might know its quality. "I hope the printing is clear."

"Yes, old boy," said Jimmy Dodson, "a brand new font, beautifully clear."

"Liberal margins, such as are beloved of the gentle reader?"

"Yes, old boy," said Jimmy Dodson, "beautiful wide margins. It will make a fine page."

"And they are printing the poem in three volumes?" asked the poet, "with a new phase in each; and also they are omitting the name of the author from the title page?"

"Yes, old boy," said Jimmy Dodson, "they are doing all that. All your instructions are being car-

ried out to the letter. By the way, would you like a frontispiece in the first volume of the Wayfarer communing for the first time with Earth, his Mother? I could get a chap I know to draw it; last year he had a picture accepted at the Academy; and Octavius would raise no objection."

"No, no," said the poet almost sternly.

"It was only a suggestion, you know, old boy," said Jimmy Dodson with nervous humility. "You are not offended, old boy, are you?"

In answer the poet extended that weak left hand which he could hardly raise. Dodson's first impulse was to clasp the fragile fingers in his own, which were of such power; but a glance at the countenance of the blind poet caused this impulse to yield to a finer instinct. Without in the least knowing why, Dodson sank to his knees and saluted the extended hand with a reverence he could not have exceeded had it been that of his sovereign.

LII

Every evening thenceforward until the third volume had been set up in type, James Dodson would return to the little room with further instalments of the printed pages, newly from the press. And full many weary hours did the poet's aged father labor through the day and night to compare the manuscript with the printed work. Weak and frail as the old man now was, half sightless as were his eyes, he yet addressed himself to this task with a joyful rapture. Sometimes, in the stress of the gladness that overcame him, he would read aloud to the poet in his thin, quavering tones, some of those passages whose quality he could not forbear to acclaim.

At these times the blind poet, ever sitting by the hearth, would listen, breathing deep, with head uplifted, and with strange emotions flitting across his inexpressibly beautiful face. And then when through sheer weariness the voice of the aged man had ceased to utter the wonderful music, he himself, in his rich and rare tones, would take up the theme; and he would speak the lines of ineffable majesty with a justice so delicate that his aged father needed no longer to look at the manuscript, but was able to verify the printed page by the poet's voice.

Sometimes these labors would even be conducted in

the presence of James Dodson. And although that robust denizen of the great world out of doors, whenever he found himself in his natural element, could never bring himself to believe that the labors he was undertaking with such an all-consuming zeal were being conducted in the cause of reason and sanity, no sooner did he enter the little room of an evening than his skepticism fell from him like an outer garment.

It was not for him to understand the words that the poet and his father recited with such a holy submission; they had no meanings for his unaccustomed ears; but the dominion of the poet's presence, which sprang from that which was now upon his face, the wonderful serenity of that sightless aspect filled the young man with an awe and a credulity which he could not recognize as belonging to himself.

"I am going wrong," he would say in his perplexity as he went his ways about the great city, "and, of course, they are as wrong as they can be — yet the marvelous thing is that they make you feel that all the world is wrong, and that they are the only reasonable people in it!"

One evening, after Jimmy Dodson had sat in a kind of entrancement for several hours while the poet had recited many passages, he was moved to ask with dry lips, "I say, old boy, Homer and Milton were blind, weren't they?"

"Tradition has it so," said the poet, and his sightless aspect was suffused with that secret and beautiful

smile that had come to haunt poor Dodson in his dreams. "But what is 'tradition' but an adumbration of the light that never was?"

On the evening that the last line of the poem had been passed for the press with an astonishing thoroughness and celerity by the co-operation of two minds which had to be almost independent of the use of the eyes, the poet committed these final pages to the care of his faithful emissary with further injunctions for their prosperity in the great world out of doors.

"Let our little treatise have reticence, chastity, sobriety," he said.

"I wish you could see the binding I have chosen," said Jimmy Dodson. "Octavius calls it very chaste indeed — you can't think what an interest Octavius is taking in the publication. Octavius made one error in his life, which we will not refer to now, but he has turned out trumps over this. He would give his ears to know the name of the author!"

"That is a secret you are pledged to respect," said William Jordan in his voice of soft irony.

"You can be quite easy about that, old boy," said Jimmy Dodson. "Wild horses shall not drag it from me; and, of course, there is not a soul in the world who would ever suspect that the author is you."

"I trust you," said the poet simply. "And there is only one further charge with which I shall tax our friendship. I shall ask you to collect all the papers that bear the impress of my hand, and lodge them at

the English Museum, in the custody of the English nation."

James Dodson contrived to dissemble his bewildered surprise.

"Of course I will do so, old boy," he said gravely and promptly. "I will make a parcel of the manuscript now. It is too late to take it round there to-night; but the first thing to-morrow I will take an hour off from the office, and I will carry it to the English Museum myself."

"Thank you, thank you," said the poet. "I thank you in the name of truth and of ages yet to be."

LIII

Some time during the forenoon of the following day the unprepossessing outline of an undersized young man with a short black bristling moustache, who wore a bowler hat, a pair of smart brown boots, and trim overcoat of blue melton cloth with a velvet collar, might have been observed in conference with one of the stalwart custodians of the portals of a massive building in the purlieus of Bloomsbury. The young man, who was somewhat pale and rather excited in his manner, bore under his right arm a brown-paper parcel of not inconsiderable bulk.

"Can't deal with it, 'ere," said the custodian of the portals, without any display of amiability that would have incurred the charge of excessive. "Better take it round to Mr. Tovey. First to the left, second to the right when you come to the top of the second flight of stairs."

In the course of a few minutes the bearer of the brown-paper parcel had made his way into the presence of Mr. Tovey, — a bald-headed and black-coated gentleman whose mien was one of determined and unalterable impassiveness.

Mr. Tovey viewed the bearer of the parcel, and particularly the parcel itself, with a polite disfavor,

which, however, did not in any sense transcend the bounds indicated by an official courtesy.

"The English Museum Authorities," said Mr. Tovey, as his visitor took the liberty of depositing the brown-paper parcel upon a table without seeking permission to do so, "the English Museum Authorities are not empowered to undertake the care of the written manuscripts or typescripts of living persons."

"Yes, but you see," said the bearer of the parcel anxiously, "but you see, the poor chap happens to be dying."

"I am afraid, sir," said Mr. Tovey, with a sympathy that was very nicely poised, "that even that unfortunate contingency is not sufficient to justify the Museum Authorities from breaking through their fixed rule. That rule is perfectly explicit; it cannot admit the manuscripts or typescripts of living persons."

"Are there no exceptions?" said the bearer of the parcel.

"If exceptions there are," said Mr. Tovey impressively, "and as I speak there are none I can call to mind, they would only be in favor of persons of such remarkable distinction that they would form no precedent."

"That is all right, then," said the bearer of the parcel with an air of relief, "because it happens that this is the work of the greatest poet in the world."

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Tovey with a very well-bred air.

The bearer of the parcel repeated his assertion.

"Is not that a somewhat comprehensive claim to advance on behalf of a living person?" said Mr. Tovey, enunciating his words very delicately.

"Well, he seems to think so, at any rate," said the bearer of the parcel, "and I suppose he ought to know."

"Would you mind informing me of the name of this accomplished person?" said Mr. Tovey, with an effective combination of polite interest and equally polite deprecation.

"His name is to be kept a secret," said the bearer of the parcel. "He doesn't want it to be known."

"I assume that his poems have been published?" said Mr. Tovey.

"Not yet," said the bearer of the parcel; "but," he added, with an air of weight that was not without its effect, "they are going to be published by Crumpett and Hawker on the twelfth of January."

"Curious, curious," said Mr. Tovey.

However, the announcement itself seemed in some measure to reassure this very courteous black-coated gentleman, since he requested the bearer of the parcel to untie the string that he might take a glance at the manuscript. This the young man proceeded to do; and it must be said that for one whose proud boast had once been that his self-possession was invincible, his heart began to beat with a preposterous violence, as soon as Mr. Tovey came to examine the contents of the parcel.

Jimmy Dodson narrowly scrutinized Mr. Tovey's impassive countenance as he ran his fingers through the pages of the manuscript, all stained and defaced by contact with compositors' pencils and with printers' thumbs.

"Rather incoherent, is it not?" said Mr. Tovey mildly, as he turned the pages over. "Is it not somewhat pagan in tone — that is, as far as there is a tone — there does not appear to be any very definite conception of Deity — and rather incoherent — rather incoherent. I am afraid this will never do."

The last by now familiar phrase seemed to piece the heart and brain of James Dodson.

"I — I suppose, sir," he said with scared eyes, "you occupying a responsible position in the English Museum, you would be rather a judge of poetry?"

"I am not accustomed to make such a claim on my own behalf," said Mr. Tovey, in whose well regulated bosom a sympathetic chord seemed to have been touched, for at least he seemed to unbend a little and he seemed to do it very nicely, "but perhaps I am entitled to say that the Oxbridge Press paid me the compliment of inviting me to edit their Chaucer, their Spenser, their Keats, their Felicia Hemans, and their James Russell Lowell. And I have also competed for the Newdigate Prize."

Jimmy Dodson strangled a groan. He clenched his hands in desperation.

"Well, all I can say is," he said, breaking out

with a violence which was so unexpected that it somewhat alarmed the courteous and self-possessed Mr. Tovey, "I don't care what you've done or what you haven't done; I don't care what you think or what you don't think, you've got there the manuscript of the greatest poem ever written — ab-so-lute-ly the greatest ever written, mark you — and you've got to have it whether you want it or not. Mind you, I know nothing about poetry myself — never cared for it — never had time to read it — but whether you believe it, or whether you don't, I know I am speaking the truth. I promised the poor chap who wrote this poem — he has been blind for weeks and he is dying by inches — that I would carry his manuscript to the English Museum — and here it is. And now you've got it you had better take care of it — and just see that you do. Good-morning."

Before the astonished Mr. Tovey could interpose a word of expostulation and remonstrance, this somewhat ill-favored and rather vulgar person who had waxed so vehement all at once had passed from his ken; and he descended the stairs and passed out of the doors of the building with a violence of demeanor which not only scandalized the austere custodians of its portals, but caused them to reprove him as he went by.

Mr. Tovey, when at last his very natural and proper astonishment had permitted him to realize that this vulgarian had gone away, and further, that his trimly kept domain had been encumbered with a

piece of brown paper and string and a thousand or so pages of foolscap all smudged and dishevelled by contact with the printers, rang his bell.

The summons was heeded by a young middle-aged gentleman who in years might have been five-and-twenty, but who in manner, demeanor and cultivated deference to all the things that were, foremost of whom was Mr. Tovey himself, was of no particular period of life.

"Mr. Toplady," said Mr. Tovey, with a well-bred concealment of what his feelings had recently undergone, "I shall be grateful if you will ask Mr. Bessy to ask Mr. Fairservice to ask Mr. MacFayden to ask Perry to ask one of the porters to remove this parcel."

Mr. Toplady bowed, thanked Mr. Tovey and withdrew delicately.

In a little while there came a knock on the door of Mr. Tovey's domain, and in response to that gentleman's invitation, a stalwart son of labor, six feet six inches high and broad in proportion, clad in a bright brown uniform with a liberal display of gold braid, entered the room, and removed the brown paper, the string, and also the manuscript in a remarkably efficient, solemn, and dignified manner.

A quarter of an hour after his feat had been performed with such admirable success this same impressive gold-braided figure knocked again on Mr. Tovey's door and entered his domain.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the stalwart, "but what is us to do with that there parcel?"

Mr. Tovey looked up from his weekly perusal of the *Journal of Literature*, to which he was a constant and esteemed contributor.

"The parcel?" he said. "What parcel, Wordsworth? Oh, yes, I think I remember." And then with a slightly humorous deprecation which had cost him two thirds of a lifetime to acquire, "Suppose, Wordsworth, you light the fires with that parcel — and, Wordsworth, suppose you don't make a noise when you close the door."

LIV

At eight o'clock in the evening of the same day when Jimmy Dodson made his nightly pilgrimage to the little room, he was greeted eagerly by him who kept the chimney-side.

"Our little treatise is in worthy hands at the English Museum?" he said. "But, good friend, I am so persuaded of it that I do not ask you to answer."

"I do answer all the same, old boy," said Jimmy Dodson with a fervor which was born of careful preparation. "I took it to the chief, the head man, the curator or whatever they call him — you see, old boy, I thought if I left it to an understrapper it might get mislaid."

"It might, it might," said the poet with a smile of approval. "This little world of ours is so strange in its ways."

"And what is more," said Jimmy Dodson, "I told him what it was. I told him it was absolutely the greatest poem in the world."

"That was doubtless wise," said the poet with his curious simplicity.

"Yet, what do you think, old boy?" said Jimmy Dodson with indignation. "He as good as said he didn't believe it. He as good as called me a liar."

"Ah," said the poet, breathing deep. "And then

— and then, in what manner did you answer him?"

"Why, old boy," said Jimmy Dodson proudly, "I did precisely what you would have done yourself. I whipped the string off the parcel; I handed him the first page of the manuscript, and I said, 'There it is; now look at it for yourself!'"

"Oh good, oh brave!" cried he who was sightless. "And — and ——?"

As his lips shaped the question, the breath of the dying poet came in great heavy gasps. The face of the unhappy Dodson was set like a piece of marble, but there was a curious intensity burning in his eyes.

"And — and? Why, what do *you* think, old boy?" said the faithful emissary, and he paused dramatically.

"He was silent," said the poet. "He dare not speak."

"No, old boy, that is just where you are wrong," said Jimmy Dodson with an air of triumph. "He spoke right enough. You see, that chap couldn't help himself. At first I felt sure he would go clean out of his mind. 'My God,' he said, 'tell me who is the author of this?' 'No,' said I, 'the authorship is to remain a dead secret.' '*You* are not the author at any rate,' he said, 'a common, vulgar little chap like you.' 'No,' I said, 'and it is no use pretending that I am; but all the same I have promised the author that I would keep his secret; and what is more I am going to keep it.' 'I shall see the publishers,' he said. 'The world has a right to know

who is the author of this.' 'By all means see them if you like,' I said, 'but you will be none the wiser. They don't know any more than you do.' Well, after that the poor old fellow — highly respectable, too — University man, and so on — behaved as though he was fairly up the pole. He swore he would know the author; he swore he wouldn't let me go out of that room until I had told him your name. You see, that chap was simply mad keen on poetry; he had edited Chaucer and Keats and those chaps for the Oxbridge Press. But no, I stood firm; and when I left him, he said, 'Well, sir, even if you won't tell me the name of the author I may tell you that this priceless manuscript will be placed among those we have of Shakespeare and Milton, for'— and these are his very words, Luney, old boy —'for,' said he, 'this brown-paper parcel is a national possession.'"

When Jimmy Dodson had concluded his account of this remarkable scene at the English Museum, and he ventured to look at the blind poet through the tears that rendered his own eyes so dim, he was overcome by horror. The sightless eyes of the poet were closed; his head was thrown back in the chair; his breathing could no longer be heard. The illusion of death was so complete that for an instant Dodson felt that he had entered its presence, and that by his own too-faithful hand he had slain his friend.

However, almost immediately the poet uttered a sigh. He then raised his head, and opened his sight-

less eyes again. "Courage, Achilles!" he could be heard to mutter faintly.

An hour of silence passed ere the voice of the poet was heard again. He then addressed his unhappy friend in the manner that became the true prince.

"Jimmy," he said, "the world will never know what it owes to one strong and faithful soul."

Yet again the dying poet held forth his hand, which yet again received the homage of his unhappy friend.

LV

A DIVINE patience sustained the poet through those weary days until there came the hour in which the miracle of his miracles was consummated, and the printed and bound volumes of his labor, emerging at last from all the vicissitudes of the press were at last laid on his knees.

The right hand he could not raise; and the left had no longer the power to support the weight of the three volumes of "Reconciliation: A Poem." Therefore were they poised upon the poet's knees, and his hands dangled upon their covers helplessly.

"This perfunctory clay has only one other duty to discharge," he said, as a slow and calm radiance overspread his face, "ere it be released from its bonds. I must await the verdict of the street-persons upon my little treatise. I must stay yet awhile until some authentic voice among them has spoken in their name. By that means I shall know that my destiny is at last complete."

His friend James Dodson assured him that that day copies of the poem had been sent to fifty of the foremost English journals.

"It may be a month, old boy, before we hear what they have got to say about it," he said.

"A month," said the poet with a slight shiver. "It is a long term. Yet it shall seem as but a day."

"They are always slow at reviewing poetry, you know," said Jimmy Dodson. "Perhaps they might even take longer than a month. You see, it is such a long poem that it will take a lot of reading; and then, of course when they have read it, they will have to think about it before they can express their opinion. In fact old boy, they are certain to have to think about it a good deal."

"Truly," said the poet, "they will have to think about it a good deal."

From that time forth the days as they passed were fraught with inexpressible pain for James Dodson. Up till the time of the issue of this strange and bewildering poem in three volumes, which all the expert minds of his acquaintance had promptly and unsparingly condemned, he had sought to keep up his heart with the reflection, frail though it was, that they might be mistaken after all. For he gathered from the researches he had recently begun to conduct upon the subject that such things had happened before.

Yet how incomprehensible it was, in the teeth of all the uncompromising hostility that had been visited upon the manuscript itself, and the remarkable apathy of all who had been brought in contact with it — publishers, printers, proof-readers, the official at the English Museum — that the author himself lying all broken in the clutch of death,

should yet possess the occult and mysterious power to convince such a one as James Dodson against his judgment, his reason, his knowledge of the world, and all the standards by which he understood life, that his own extravagant estimate, his own ridiculous, preposterous, overweening estimate of the merits of his work should yet derive an ample sanction from the presence of him who proclaimed it.

"When I am away from that place I know the poor chap is hopelessly mad," Jimmy Dodson would say to himself in his unhappy self-communion; "and I know his old father is hopelessly mad as well; it is proved by the judgment of others; yet as soon as I enter that accursed little room behind that accursed little shop they both seem to have such marvelous sanity that they make me ashamed of my own."

From the time his friend's poem was given to the world Jimmy Dodson spent his days hoping against hope. In the face of such emphatic denial of the merits of the work it called for great courage to venture to believe that after all it might vindicate itself. Yet day after day he scanned the columns of the newspapers in the vain search for a vindication that he might carry to the dying man. Nor was he able to elicit any favorable tidings from the firm of Crumpett and Hawker. Their interest in the work terminated with its issue to the press. They had not engaged to advertise it, nor to canvass for its sale among their clients the booksellers.

Therefore, at the end of the first month of its issue not only had it been passed over in silence by the newspapers, but also not a single copy had been sold to the public.

In the face of these cold facts Dodson had scarcely the courage to approach his dying friend, yet an irresistible power semed to draw him to his presence. It pierced his heart to observe the ludicrous, pathetic, overweening faith of the dying poet in that which he had given to the world. As he grew weaker and weaker in body, this sense of achievement seemed to mount to greater heights in his veins, so that the unhappy Dodson felt that he had no alternative but to continue to act the amazing rôle he had already played so many times.

One evening he said to the white-haired man who welcomed him into the shop, "I suppose we must keep it up till the end comes, but God knows it is wearing me out. I have lost a stone in weight; I can't eat my meals; I can't sleep at night. Old man, this business is killing James Dodson by inches; but I suppose he must keep it up to the bitter end."

"Yes," said the old man faintly, "the truth must be concealed from the dying Achilles that the great world out of doors has rejected his labors. Yet it is meet that we ourselves should continue in our homage to this mighty one, for we do but anticipate the verdict of ages unborn."

"Verdict of ages unborn!" said Dodson, with contempt and bitterness, for his own dire suffering

appeared to be overcoming his resolve; "there will be no verdict of ages unborn if we go on at this rate. Not a single copy has been sold up to date. If I could only scrape together the money, which I can't, I would insert a full-page advertisement in the *Times*. I see the *Journal of Literature* has acknowledged it among the books received, but they take care not to give a bit of recognition to the author. They must have found out that he's a long while a-dying."

As the unhappy Dodson entered this evening the presence of the poet, he seemed to discern a curious anguish in the eyes of his dying friend.

"Jimmy," said the poet in a scarcely audible voice, "the hand of death is upon me. There hardly remains more than a day and a night of the sands of life. Yet I would like to hear that my labors have received some sort of sanction. Have they made no sign? Have they said nothing?"

The entreaty in the sightless gaze filled the unhappy Dodson with a kind of reckless despair.

"Have they said nothing?" he said in choking accents, yet his strange cockney speech sounded like music, so intense was the emotion with which it vibrated. "Have they made no sign, old boy? Why — why, you can't believe what a sensation your poem is making! They are printing a second edition, and it will run to — to a hundred thousand copies. The — the first was — was over ten thousand you know, and that has already been over subscribed.

The papers are full of it — greatest thing ever done — better than Homer, better than Shakespeare and so on, although, of course, old boy, they put it more literary. I wish you could see the face of Octavius. He is the proudest man in London because Crumpett and Hawker happened to have the luck to publish it. But Octavius deserves credit, doesn't he, old boy, because from the first he saw its merits? He says poetry is going to be fashionable. Duchesses in fur coats drive up in their motors to inquire the name of the author, and when Octavius says he can't tell 'em because he don't know, they get — well, they get *ratty!* I believe Octavius would give his ears to know the name of the author. He has offered to double my screw if I will tell him. And every paper in London pesters us to death for your photograph and a few details concerning your life."

"And — and the persons in the street, do you think they read with knowledge?"

"I am sure they do. As I went round the corner to get my lunch to-day I saw two chaps with copies of it under their arms."

"And — and in what manner do they express themselves concerning it? Do you suppose they understand? Do you suppose these poor purblind ones accept the ampler interpretation of human destiny?"

"Of course they do, old boy — that is as well as they can. I don't know much about literature my-

self, but some of the reviews that are coming out in the highest quarters are enough to make you dizzy. They — they say this — this poem of yours, old boy, is going — is going to rev-revolutionize thought and — and philosophy and — and everything else."

"My friend," said the dying man softly, "I would have you bring me the words of one among these poor street-persons; and the aged man, my father, shall read them to me; and then — and then I shall ask no more."

The face of Dodson was the color of snow. His eyes were full of despair.

"Very well, old boy," he stammered, "I — I will bring you one of these reviews — and — and you shall hear for yourself what they think about this marvelous work of yours."

"Bring it to-morrow evening at eight o'clock," said the poet in a voice that could hardly be heard. "I will wait until then."

"I will not fail," promised his friend.

As Dodson burst out of the shop in a paroxysm of wild despair, he prayed that when he came on the morrow, this mighty spirit which contended with death should have yielded already.

LVI

WHEN on the following evening the tap was heard upon the shutters, and it was answered by the white-haired old man, it was a haggard, unkempt, wild-eyed figure that stood upon the threshold, trembling in every limb.

"Does he still live?" was the first question uttered, yet James Dodson had hardly the power to frame it.

"He lives, and he awaits you," said the old man.

The haggard figure on the threshold gave a groan of anguish.

"Is — is he still in his right mind?" asked the unhappy Dodson.

"The noble mind of Achilles was never so valiant," said the old man, "as now that the sands of life have so nearly run."

Dodson reeled as he entered the shop.

"I've been praying all day that he would be taken," he said hoarsely in the ear of the old man. "You see, I've done my best — but — but I'm no scholar. I — I've not had the education. I've got a chap I know to give me a hand — he reviews novels for *The Talisman*. It was the best I could do in the time. We've laid it in all we knew — better than Shakespeare, better than Homer, better than the coves who did the Bible — oh, I tell you we've not

spared an ounce of the paint! But you must read it quickly, because you know although the sense is all right — absolutely the greatest thing of its kind in the world, and so on — it's a bit weak in places, and the poor old boy is so bright these days that he might find out what we've done — and if he should do that he might understand it all — and — and — if — he — understood — it — all ——"

Dodson covered his eyes with his hands. As for the last time he tottered through the shop and crossed the threshold of the little room, his powerful stunted frame seemed to be overborne.

The poet still kept his chair beside the bright hearth. The grey hue of dissolution was already upon his cheeks. But to that friend who for the last time encountered their gaze, it seemed that those orbs which so long had been sightless, had in their last extremity been accorded the power of vision.

The prey of pity and terror, Dodson averted his gaze helplessly.

"You have brought the verdict, faithful one?" said the poet; and the young man understood, even in the pass to which he himself had come, how greatly the noble voice transcended in its quality all that had ever sounded in his ears.

"I have, old boy," said Dodson defiantly, yet his own voice was like the croak of a raven.

"Begin, O my father," said the dying poet.

With an automatic obedience which neither sought

to comprehend nor to control, Dodson's hands dived into the recesses of his overcoat. Therefrom they produced a reporter's notebook, half full of a hasty and clumsy pencil scrawl. This he gave to the old man.

"It begins here," he said, indicating the place in an urgent whisper. "It is not very clear, but I hadn't much time. Can you make it out? Read it as quickly as ever you can, and then perhaps he will not notice that it is not all that it might be."

"Begin, O my father!" said the gentle voice of the dying man.

Immediately the thin, high, quavering tones of the old man began to read. At his first words the figure beside the hearth seemed to uplift his head, and to strain all his senses; the glazed and sightless eyes were enkindled; a strange rapture played about the parted lips.

Dodson listened in a kind of dull terror. He dared not look at the face of the poet, nor yet at that of him who read. As he sat in impotence midway between the two, with fire and ice in his veins, he could not follow the words that proceeded from the old man's lips.

At last it was borne in on him that a miracle had been wrought. The white-haired, feeble, half-blind old creature was not crooning his own crude pencilled phrases, which he knew to be so inept that he felt them to be a blasphemous mockery.

That which proceeded from the lips of this aged

man was couched in terms of wisdom and beauty. It began by setting forth briefly the place of the world-poet in the hierarchy of mankind, which was consonant with mankind's own place in the hierarchy of nature. It indicated briefly the scope and status of the world-poet; and in a short, powerful, lucid argument it proceeded to add another to the group which time was constantly conspiring to limit.

It indicated that which went to the making of a world-poet; a thousand years of prayer and vigil; of unceasing strife against the things that were. It indicated what the world-poet was in essence and in substance; how he transcended all men in their several stations because he was as they were themselves, yet by his power of vision rendered infinitely more; how this divine manifestation of the truth that all the world was kin, was a doctor, a lawyer, a soldier, a teacher, a statesman, a tiller of the earth, a peruser of books.

It proceeded briefly to rehearse the theme of this the latest of the world-poets in the order of his coming, who was yet destined to take precedence of them all. Differentiating classic art from the romantic, and claiming for the poet of the *Reconciliation* the foremost place in the nobler school, inasmuch that his poem is like a pool whose depths are so measureless that its surface is tranquil, and yet so clear that it becomes a mirror that faithfully reflects the features of all that gaze therein, it recounted how the poem treats the life of man in

all its phases. The mighty theme commences with that unspeakable suffering by which man was taught to speak, that strange ascension from the higher anthropoids to a partial rationalism, culminating in that stage of "Reason" which offered the ill-starred creature Man, in lieu of an ample garment for his solace, protection, and utility, a kind of ridiculous swaddling-clothes, in which he could neither walk nor yet inhabit himself with decency. It reveals Man, the Wayfarer, ever straining after that which he knows not how to attain, until worn out with the heat and dust and the bloody conflict of the battle, the unhappy Warrior-traveler commits himself, a tired, baffled, war-worn child of destiny, yet grateful in his weariness, to the arms of Earth, his mother, again.

To the poet, Man's terrestrial life, in the present stage of his development, is a progress through an eternal forest; and it submits itself to three phases — bewilderment, terror, pity. Through these he conducts the Warrior-Soul ever seeking for "truth," ever engaged in a titanic struggle with his "reason" — that sword with which he wounds himself because he comprehends not how to use it rightly — yet ever seeking to reconcile the primal instinct of his own divinity with "the facts of experience" which in vain he strives to overthrow.

He begins with Man's childhood. When to the mocking amazement of Earth, his primitive mother, the heroic but ill-starred Warrior has wrested from

Destiny the power of speech, of thought, of will to bear his head erectly, he forsakes his half-brothers, the beasts of the field, and in a spirit of wonder and inquiry fares forth until he comes to a great city. In its purlieus he grows bewildered by the numberless things he cannot understand, and by the reception of answers that he cannot adjust to his partial development. Yet the Warrior is ever sustained by a sense of his own prowess, and proud of that which it has already achieved, he believes that when it can address its questions to the Whole of that which lies before it, it will comprehend it all.

The second phase of the poem opens with the Warrior's tragic discovery that his innate sense of divinity is only comparative; that although he is Man in relation to the Ape, in his relation to the universe he is no more than Man-Ape gibbering upon the branches of the Eternal Forest; and that the sense of his own divinity is founded upon his superiority to the beasts of the field. In this tragic phase, the Warrior, overcome by disillusionment, alternately hacks himself with his sword, and at other times seeks to cast it away from him. Overcome by horror he faints in his weakness by the wayside, yet awakens from his hideous nightmare to find his body weltering in blood, and the sword, all hacked and jagged, still in his hand.

The third phase is that in which the Warrior returns again to Earth, his rude mother, whom an overweening exaltation in his prowess has led him to

forsake. Having returned to her as a babe, and lain at suck at the brown breasts of the sweet savage, she caresses him and croons her strange songs in his ears; and to give him pleasure and sustenance — because the Warrior whom she has long mourned as lost has ever been the favorite among all her children — she whispers to him as he lies again in her bosom that he is indeed divine.

Girt by this forgiveness, and clad in the valor of his divinity once again, a new and ampler strength is given to the Warrior's right hand. He learns for the first time in what manner to use his Sword. Yet no sooner does he learn so to do than he understands how Earth, his mother, has deceived him, in order that she may give pleasure to the favorite among all her children, who has returned to lie at her brown breasts. And the Warrior blesses her for the deception, as otherwise he could never have received the strength in his right hand; and without that strength he could not have learned to use the sword of his reason. The poem closes in the exaltation of an infinite pity and tenderness, for the Warrior, blind and spent and weak, with the Sword all broken and jagged upon his knees, has had his inquiries answered, and ceasing to struggle and to resent, in his concern for all his brothers who have not yet learned to use their swords, he defends their amazing formulas and shibboleths and extraordinary self-deceptions, whereby they seek to acquire the strength to do so. And in a passage of tender irony

that has no parallel he entreats his poor brothers to continue to deceive themselves; and the Warrior concludes with an invocation to Earth, his mother, for her loving and wise deception, whereby the proudest of her sons has come to lie at peace.

As the white-haired man continued to read the appreciation of the poem, which he himself had wrought, thereby re-enacting the deception of the Mother of the Warrior Soul, he revealed to the dying poet how his work in all the wonderful assemblance of its qualities surpassed any other that had been given to the world. He appraised the metre which only the highest inspiration would have dared to employ; he appraised the miraculous blend of gravity, sonority, sweetness, purity; the ever-gathering range and power of those mighty cadences which swept the whole gamut of the emotions as though they were the strings of a lyre. He showed how the people of unborn ages would be able to derive stimulus and sanction for their labors; how the poet's divine simplicity was such that he who ran might read; how the official "souls" who infest the groves of Academe would be able to cherish it for its "art"; how the humblest street-persons who walked the streets of the great city would be able to cherish it for its truth. This epic of Man the Warrior ever trampling the brakes of the Eternal Forest, cutting out the path with the Sword in his right hand in the fruitless search for that which will reconcile him to his partial vision, with the

nobly pitiful irony of its conclusion that in the present stage of the Warrior's development the reconciliation must be sought by compromise — this epic had in its austere mingling together of those elements of tragedy which purge man's nature with the healing and co-ordinating properties which reconcile diverse and conflicting factors of experience with the primal belief of Man Himself, a universal power which had been given to no other poet in the modern or the ancient world. And the old man concluded with the prophecy that when "Civilization" itself had sunk to a mere shibboleth of the remote age of "Reason," the half-divine, half-barbarous music of the unknown poet of the *Reconciliation*, would prove the only *via media* between the epoch of ampler vision and that fantastic shadowography of the long ago when Man seemed other than He was.

Throughout the reading of this appraisement of his labors, the blind-eyed poet seemed to vibrate with every word that came upon his ears. As each phrase uttered by that thin, high, quavering voice addressed the entranced being of the poet, the frail and broken form seemed to sway in unison therewith; and the secret and beautiful smile lurking within the hollows of the cheeks seemed to illuminate even the sightless eyes, so that poor Dodson, who sat listening faintly to the old man's words, was tortured continually by the illusion that the sight had returned to the eyes of his dying friend.

As the old man, never failing to give expression

to his own personal vindication of that which the poet had wrought, won nearer and nearer towards the end, the dying man was heard to murmur, "Courage, Achilles! Courage, Achilles!" for he seemed almost to fear that consciousness would forsake him before he could realize his own apotheosis to the full.

When the old man in a kind of triumph and defiance had come to the end of his task, the radiance upon the poet's face was starlike in its lustre.

"Oh, oh, he can see! he can see!" muttered Dodson, in a wild consternation. "He has the sight in his eyes."

The poet had stretched forth his weak left hand as though in search of something.

He shaped a phrase with his lips, which Dodson had not the power to understand.

"What does he say?" cried Dodson wildly.

However, the white-haired man appeared to understand. He took from the table not the carefully written pages from which he had been reading, but the threepenny reporter's notebook in which Dodson's hastily pencilled criticism had been scribbled. To Dodson's profound wonder the old man carried this over to where the poet lay and placed it in the outstretched left hand. But the hand had not the power to hold it now.

The poet was heard to mutter some inaudible words.

The old man bore the somewhat unclean threepenny reporter's notebook, with its dilapidated green

cover, to the lips of the poet, who pressed them upon it with a half-joyful gesture. In the act he had ceased to breathe.

It was left to poor Dodson to discover that the act of the divine clemency had, after many days, been extended to the Warrior Soul. The old man was still holding the threepenny reporter's notebook to the lips of the mighty dead, when Dodson tore it from his hand. Clutching it convulsively the young man ran forth of the room and headlong through the shop. Bare-headed, wild-eyed he reached the frost-bound, fog-engirdled darkness of the January streets. As he ran up one street and down another, not knowing nor desiring to know whither he was bound, yet with that in his clutch ever pressed to his own white lips, he cried out, "Oh Luney, Luney, I wish now I had never known you!"

LVII

In the course of the afternoon of the following day, the old man, as he was clearing away a quantity of *débris* that choked the fire-grate in the little room, heard a tap upon the closed shutters of the shop. Supposing it to proceed from the hand of that blind agent of providence to whom the world was so much indebted, he left his occupation and went forth to open the door.

Upon the threshold of the shop he discovered an elderly, grizzled, gray-bearded man, a total stranger to him. The face of the stranger was of great resolution.

No sooner had the old man opened the door of the shop and beheld this unexpected appearance, than the man upon the threshold looked into his eyes. Suddenly he swept the hat from his head, and his gray hairs fluttered in the icy January wind.

"I think, sir," he said in a harsh, strange accent, which yet was that of awe, "I think, sir, I stand in the presence of the poet."

The old man recoiled a step from his visitor in mute surprise.

"Forgive me, sir, said his visitor, "forgive the importunity of the vulgar, but I am hardly to blame. I have come all the way from Aberdeen to look upon

the poet. You see, I have been a reviewer of books for the *Caledonian Journal* for fifty years, but a month ago I received a book from which my pen has refrained. But I have not been able to refrain my eyes from its author. To-day, upon my arrival from Aberdeen, I went direct to the publishers, who at first even denied an acquaintance with the poet's name, but ultimately I found a young man in their office who sent me here."

"The poet is not I," said the old man humbly.

The visitor appeared surprised and incredulous.

"If you are not the poet, sir," he said, "I am sure you are a near kinsman."

The old man peered at the grim features of his visitor with his half-blind eyes. "You appear to be simple and gentle," he said softly. "Perhaps you will follow."

The old man led his visitor into the shop, into the little room, which was now deserted, and thence up the stairs, into a small chamber lighted with dim candles, in which the poet lay.

As soon as the visitor beheld that which was therein contained, he sank to his knees by its side. He remained in that attitude a long while.

When he arose the aged man was gazing upon him with his half-blind eyes. They confronted one another like a pair of children.

Suddenly the visitor leaned across the bed in an act of further homage to the lifeless clay.

"Why do you do that?" said the white-haired man at his side.

"Why do I do this?" said the other, and his powerful spreading northern speech appeared to strike the walls of the tiny chamber. "Why do I do this? I am afraid, sir, it must be left to my great great grandchildren to answer your question."

THE END

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